

Imaging and Re-Imaging Public Housing:
From Modernism to New Urbanism

By

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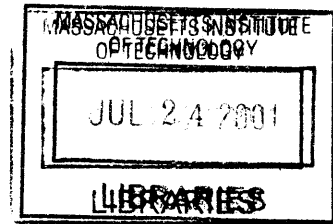
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Abstract

When public housing was first introduced as a program on the heels of the Great Depression, its image was a largely positive one, resulting as it did from the confluence of modernism, marketing, and media representation. This led to the eventual acceptance of an otherwise radical, and what some considered deeply un-American, program. Public housing design, therefore, not only marked a transformation in neighborhood form from “slum” to streetless superblock; it also entailed a shift in symbolic and metaphorical associations.

Quite precipitously, initial support for public housing eroded, owing to the social, political and economic vagaries of each time period since its inception. Specifically, as the beneficiaries changed from working whites to poor blacks and other minorities, the relevant policymakers’ overarching social and political agenda changed as well – and with it, their vision of how the design of public housing could help achieve these objectives. From the building of high-rise “projects” out of the “slums” – and in turn, low-rise HOPE VI neighborhoods out of the “projects” – what has resulted has been one draconian experiment in design after the other, often leaving in its wake the rubble of prior oversights. In this scenario, design has come to be viewed (often only vicariously) as helping to realize the American Dream – or alternately, to exacerbate a perceived urban nightmare.

With this assumption about the impact of design in hand, this thesis employs three case studies – one in Washington DC, one in Boston and one in Chicago – that trace the evolution of policymakers’ preferred outcomes and their associated images. It so doing, it argues that policymakers used the emerging media to help cast prior visions as failures and future visions as solutions. By extension, the thesis also explores the actual design approaches employed at each critical phase, arguing that the consequences they entailed have helped to solidify the public’s negative images of public housing – often with dire consequences for its residents and for the wider communities of which they are a part. After a prognosis about the outcomes of HUD’s current HOPE VI initiative, this thesis concludes with an analysis of alternate design approaches.

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To my family

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More personally, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support even at times when I doubted myself. My mother and father, although they may have wondered why I am still in school, have always supported and encouraged me to pursue my dreams no matter what obstacles are in the way. My brother and sister and their beautiful children will forever remind me of what is truly important in life. Finally and most especially I would like to thank the one person who I know will always be there and has for the past five years been my strongest supporter. Rob, you are and always will be my main source of inspiration.

Introduction

Initially, there was much excitement about the potential of public housing for both uplifting the working poor and providing temporary housing for returning veterans and their families. The form of housing was almost a celebration of this original purpose, and was often in stark contrast to the housing that existed on the site before. Especially since the Housing Act of 1949, public housing was heavily influenced by the Modern movement and thus was colored by the belief that the 20th century had given birth to the “modern man” who would need a radically new kind of architecture in which to live. At that time, there was a genuine belief that these new forms of housing would achieve the impossible task of transforming the lives of the urban poor, mainly because there was no evidence yet available to suggest otherwise. Furthermore, the new public housing was marketed in a way that would help diminish any disbelief.

Today, the image of public housing is very different and, therefore, I would argue, the design and marketing response also needs to be very different. The failures of public housing have been well documented by the popular media and are ever present in the minds of those who seek to correct them. The images that designers are responding to are not those when public housing was first built - which in many cases would be images of success - but rather the images the housing acquired after years of divestment and mismanagement. Today, rather than designing in a way that celebrates the potential of public housing, the goal is to make public housing essentially disappear.

Teaming up with the Congress for the New Urbanism, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Department (HUD) is attempting to erase the negative images that people have of public housing and replace them with new images of neo-traditional low-density neighborhood designs. Often, the objective of the re-design is to create housing that does *not* look like public housing, and almost always results in much lower densities with many fewer housing units. Although not always explicit, the design objectives that are mandated under HOPE VI are a direct response to the image of public housing failure. For example, acting in response to fears of creating new “vertical ghettos”, HUD now requires a waiver in order to build elevator buildings for families and is explicit in its preference for low-rise, lower-density forms of housing. In cases where housing is deemed severely distressed, complete clearance of the existing site is viewed as essential in order to successfully transform the projects into mixed-income communities. Furthermore, in the marketing of the new mixed-income communities, public housing or the whole notion of mixing incomes is often never mentioned.

By examining the design and marketing of public housing both when it was first built and now, under the HOPE VI program, I hope to illustrate how the form of public housing reflects the way in which it is perceived. This comparison will not only highlight the differences but also any similarities in the approach to design. The similarities can be just as telling in that they may illustrate views that persist despite the stylistic or formal differences in the architecture. For example, at each period of housing construction, the complete demolition of the existing housing was deemed necessary for the success of the transformation. In most examples, I would argue that the new housing after HOPE VI is just as easily identifiable as the housing it replaced because it

is often much less dense and more uniform than the surrounding urban context. As I hope this study will illustrate, despite whether the project is the result of Modernism or New Urbanism, public housing continues to be a new experiment needing to be imaged or re-imaged in the hopes of gaining the acceptance of an often ambivalent public.

The thesis will begin by looking more generally at imaging (and re-imaging) starting with a chapter that attempts to give greater definition to the phenomenon, especially as it relates to public housing. Chapters two and three will illustrate how the earliest public housing was imaged, first, following the Housing Act of 1937 and, then, following the Housing Act of 1949, and how with each subsequent change in legislation came a different set of imaging objectives. Chapter four brings the thesis to the present day by examining how public housing, after attaining the inglorious title of “the housing of last resort,” is being re-imaged under HUD’s HOPE VI program.

Following the more general overview of public housing’s imaging and, then re-imaging, three case studies in three different cities – Washington, Boston and Chicago - will be examined in greater detail. Each case study is taken from a pool of HOPE VI projects pre-selected by HUD as the best examples of recent public housing transformation. Choosing from the pre-selected group allows one to not only see which projects are preferred by the program’s administrator but also how the projects are marketed and put forth as the best examples to follow. Within HUD’s selection, the re-imaging under HOPE VI generally fall within three different housing typology transformations: the low-rise “barracks-style” housing to row house, the low-rise “barracks-style” housing to detached house, and the mid- or high-rise building to row house. The cases that will be

examined are selected from each of the transformation types, respectively: Ellen Wilson Dwellings to the Townhomes on Capitol Hill, Orchard Park to the Orchard Gardens Estates and Cabrini-Green to the Old Town Village. Finally, the last chapter will assess the three cases and the urban design implications of public housing's highly imageable transformation.

1

Imaging and Re-Imaging

Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings.¹

Image of the City
Kevin Lynch

The children called home “Hornets” or, more frequently, “the projects” or, simply, the “jects” (pronounced jets). Pharoah called it “the graveyard.” But they never referred to it by its full name: the Governor Henry Horner Homes.²

There Are No Children Here
Alex Kotlowitz

¹ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1964), p. 1.

² Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 8.

Imaging and Re-Imaging

This thesis begins with the assumption that today there is an image attached to public housing, which is the composite image from many different sources. Just as the single-family house has come to symbolize the American Dream, public housing has come to symbolize the failure of government-subsidized housing for the poor and the most extreme conditions of poverty in the American city. Former Secretary of HUD, Andrew Cuomo, understood this when he said, “The very image of public housing has been one of deteriorating buildings and crime-ridden neighborhoods.”³ Conversely, it can be argued that, when public housing was first built, it had a very different image since it was a relatively new concept and a new pairing of words in the mainstream American vocabulary.

Kevin Lynch, in his seminal work, *The Image of the City*, undertook the first systematic attempt to understand systematically how people perceive their environments, and for the first time placed image and city within the same context. In the book, Lynch argues that if designers understand how people perceive their cities and design to make them more aware of their perceptions, they will create cities that are more imageable and more psychologically satisfying. Lynch defines imageability as “that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer.”⁴ When we apply this language to public housing, it is unmistakable that it easily passes the test of “evoking a strong image”; however, a strong image is not

³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *A Promise Being Fulfilled: The Transformation of America's Public Housing* (July, 2000), p. 1.

⁴ Lynch, 9.

necessarily a positive one. As Cuomo suggested, the image of public housing has become synonymous with the worst conditions of the American inner city.

Although groundbreaking, Lynch's study was limited to the image the city already had, and was not concerned as much with how the image developed or where it came from. Since the book was written long before the image-saturated society in which we now live, Lynch's studies were more grounded and concerned with the pedestrian's impressions and mental maps. Today, although a pedestrian's mental image of a place is still crucially important, that mental image is created through many different means and is not limited to personal observation. That said, one could argue, as this thesis does, that the image of a place has always been formed by a confluence of many different sources, and often not at all through personal observation. However, one cannot deny the sheer volume of visual and verbal images that exist today that did not exist just a few short decades ago. Given the abundance of visual image-making, it is more likely that pedestrians today have already begun to develop an image long before they actually see a place for themselves.

In recent years, city leaders – and to a lesser extent designers – have acknowledged the presence of these other image-makers and have begun to react accordingly, rendering the term *image* as a verb. This neologism, as it is more often used, has never been given a precise definition, mainly because it remains rather enigmatic, especially within the field of city design and development. According to Webster's dictionary, "to image" has the following meanings: "to call up a mental picture of; to describe or portray in words; or to create a representation of." In fact, imaging entails all of these, but when

it comes to imaging a place or an entire city, it acquires even more meaning. In a recent colloquium at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) titled *Imaging the City* – the results of which will be published in the forthcoming book, *Imaging the City: Continuing Struggles and New Directions* – the term *imaging* again took on multiple meanings, but was more closely aligned with the physical city and those seeking to give shape to the city's image: "To a greater extent than ever before, places no longer simply *have images*; they are constantly *being imaged* (and re-imaged), often in ways that are highly self-conscious and highly contentious."⁵ Architects, urban designers, planners, politicians, journalists, marketing and public relations experts – and the list goes on – all take part in the imaging process. As the results of the colloquium suggest, urban imagery is the outcome of many different things:

For us, all city design, all constructions of the city, offer material that people may include in their images of their environment. The built and building city are a part of the experience of all city dwellers, and it is thus theirs to incorporate, interpret, or ignore. All urban imagery, however, is not a product of the built city. Social experiences, historical events, human knowledge of all kinds are powerful influences, and they play upon the imagery of places.⁶

Lynch also understood that there is more to image construction than the observation of an isolated object or project, even though it was not a focus of his book: "Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events

⁵ Lawrence J. Vale and Sam Bass Warner, eds, *Imaging the City: Continuing Struggles and New Directions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research Press, 2001), p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

leading up to it, the memory of past experiences.”⁷ In the case of public housing, people have images of “the projects” or “slums” that are formed through media representations, preconceptions and more recently sources of entertainment such as television and film. In his book *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors*, Lawrence Vale notes, “the worst projects are media targets, and give public housing tenants and those who constantly judge them an unfairly criminalized identity.” Public housing can even symbolize the failure of government in general, as Vale continues: “the lingering project behemoths and the system of housing authorities that mismanage them symbolize everything wrong with government and everything wrong with the poor.”⁸

As will be discussed further in the next two chapters, even though public housing was not yet the symbol of government failure when it was initially built, it was heavily imaged through a combination of strategic endeavors in housing legislation, marketing and design. Those involved with the transformation of housing for the poor, initially from slums to public housing, understood the need for imaging. Reacting to the negative images attached to the perceived slum neighborhoods, the supporters of public housing promoted images of new and better solutions for housing the poor. In defense of their actions, federal and local housing authorities were primarily responsible for “selling” the new housing solutions to justify the substantial expenditure of taxpayer dollars. Individual housing authorities around the country were required by law to report to the United States Housing Authority (USHA) progress in the area of new housing

⁷ Lynch, 1.

⁸ Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 387.

construction.⁹ Commonly found in these annual reports were pairings of before-and-after images used to highlight the striking differences between the slum and the new public housing.

Important to the initial imaging of public housing, housing authorities and their architects sought to exploit the formal and stylistic differences between the architecture and urban form of the new housing and that of the slum. However, with the earliest projects, emphasis was placed on differentiating the urban design more than the architecture. The urban design objectives focused primarily on bringing light and air into sites formerly made up of dark tenements and alleys. This was accomplished through fairly radical moves, including the creation of internalized housing around semi-enclosed green courtyards and/or the repetition of parallel uniform slabs. The low-rise scale and proportion of windows of the architecture were more in keeping with that of the existing housing found in abutting neighborhoods. Even still, the economies of scale required that public housing be standardized, highly repetitive and stripped of much architectural detailing, thus creating a visible contrast between it and the surrounding urban fabric.

The second phase of public housing construction, following the Housing Act of 1949, achieved a much greater break from the existing condition, both in the architecture and urban design. As a result of the increased need for affordable housing and the amplified desire to create a formal difference in the architecture and urban design, higher-density and high-rise forms of housing were more commonly used. Maximizing

⁹ Since the Housing Act of 1938, the local authorities were required to report to the USHA their actions and total expenditures for each calendar year. Later, when the construction of public housing ceased, the

open space and minimizing the architecture's imprint on the land became primary objectives. Over and over again, images appearing in housing authority reports reinforced the desired shift from the more traditional architecture of the past to the more modern architecture of the future.

Not long after many of the projects were completed, however, they began to show signs of decay, and the positive images put forth by housing promoters were replaced by negative images put forth by the media. Like the slum neighborhoods before public housing, now the housing itself was the target of media attack. However, an important difference in the intervening period was the ubiquity and widespread distribution of image-producing media. Contributing to the downward spiral of public housing's image were the many newspapers, magazines and books in circulation, and some noteworthy portrayals of public housing in television and film. These sources contributed much to the imaging of public housing, much more than the personal accounts and mental maps studied by Lynch. Then as today, the media's image almost always replaces the participant-observant image, since most people had never set foot in a "project" personally, and most likely never would. This distance from the actual place further fuels existing stereotypes and may even heighten any preconceived notions the public already has. Rather than experience a project for what it really is or get to know the community living there, many people remain satisfied with secondhand accounts instead of firsthand exposure.

reports switched their focus to other activities. Eventually, the reports stopped entirely (some time in the 1980's, although a precise date has yet to be found and varies from one PHA to the next).

There are many examples one can look to for imaging by the media. The following is just a small sample and some will reappear later in the case studies. Newspaper accounts of the projects are probably the most prolific and often feature the housing when it is in its worst physical shape. All PHA's and their housing are frequently vilified in the local press through a combination of negative visual and literary imagery. According to Sandra Henriquez, the current CEO of the Boston Housing Authority, if her name is not mentioned in the day's *Boston Globe*, she is "optimistic that it's going to be a good day."

In addition to newspapers, public housing is also featured prominently in many widely read and critically acclaimed books, several of which are set in Chicago. One of the better-known titles is *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America*, by Alex Kotlowitz, which illustrates how violence has infused the Henry Horner Homes project in Chicago's West Side. In one of the more telling quotes from the book, one of the boys says, "If I grow up, I want to be a bus driver," replacing the usual "when" for "if."¹⁰ Set in another section of the same city, *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago*, recounts what it was like growing up in the Ida B. Wells project through the eyes of two of its residents. More recently, Sudhir Venkatesh attempts to give a more accurate picture of the community living in Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes before the project is demolished in *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto*. Other books portray life in inner city public schools. Although not directly about the projects, they still present a vivid picture of the projects' youngest and most vulnerable residents and the often-difficult job of teaching

¹⁰ Kotlowitz, 17.

them. Some examples are *Savage Inequalities* by Jonathan Kozol and *Dangerous Minds* by Louanne Johnson, which would later become a feature film and television series.

In television and film, the images are no less explicit. On television, shows like the 1970's sitcom *Good Times* and, more recently, *The PJ's* provide comical portraits of the projects, while at the same time help to build an image for a wide, mainstream audience. *Good Times* was set in a high-rise public housing project in Chicago's West Loop. The show's creator grew up in Cabrini-Green, lending the show firsthand knowledge of what it was like living in a "project." This knowledge formed the basis of the show and much of its humorous dialogue, such as "J.J. where's my hairspray?" "Under the sink. I used it to wipe out a couple bugs last night." "Mama, it's so desolate out there, the muggers are muggin' each other!"¹¹ *The PJ's* is a recent cartoon series that revolves around a housing project superintendent – voiced by Eddie Murphy – his long-suffering wife and their fellow residents. The show's main characters are modeled after existing stereotypes of people living in the projects. *Good Times* and *The PJ's* are just two examples of how conditions in many of the worst public housing projects had gotten so bad that HUD and its housing authorities had literally become the laughing stock of the nation.

In film, the image of public housing has attained an almost iconic position to the point that when Hollywood wants to capture the essence of the inner city, film producers often turn to the projects. Recently, filming was supposed to begin in one of Chicago's

¹¹ *Good Times* website

housing projects for the film *Hardball: A Season in the Projects* starring Keanu Reeves as a coach for a children's baseball team. After much protesting by city residents, many of whom were public housing residents, and disapproval by the city's mayor, the film was canceled. Disapproval of the film was due to its negative portrayal of children living in the projects. Two of the more recent examples of films representing the projects are the critically acclaimed documentary, *Hoop Dreams*, and Spike Lee's *Clockers*. *Hoop Dreams* is about two boys growing up in Chicago's inner city, one from Cabrini-Green and the other from the South Side. Filmed over a period of six years, the film gives a poignant picture of life in the projects and contrasts it with the very different life centered on a predominantly white school in the suburbs. Beginning with gruesome scenes of young blacks violently murdered and left for dead, *Clockers* offers a more frightening view of a drug- and crime-infested project in New York City. Filmed almost entirely in and around the project, the film further contributes to the sinister image of public housing the viewer most likely already has.

Reacting to the negative imagery repeatedly presented in the media and fueled by the nation's continued disdain for public housing and its residents, housing authorities are once again forced to image – or rather *re-image* – public housing. Re-imaging is similar to the prior imaging of the slums in that it is a deliberate attempt to transform the negative image that a place has acquired over time. As with the transformation of the slums, the transformation of public housing cannot merely involve a physical change, even though it is often the physical transformation that is the most striking. Rather, one must also look at the change in the housing's overall image. In particular, when one is seeking to transform the most severely distressed public housing into mixed-income

communities, countering any preexisting negative associations is arguably more important in order to attract the kinds of upwardly mobile individuals and families that would otherwise choose to live somewhere else.

As with the earlier imaging, there are many ways in which housing authorities attempt to re-image public housing. As already mentioned, the most obvious and immediately visible way is to physically transform the project. However, rather than looking to Modernism and its architecture of progressivism, the housing architects are now looking to the New Urbanism and its architecture of *regressivism*, at a moment when HUD is seeking to return the program to its original aim of providing housing for the upwardly mobile. Interestingly, in order to attract a more middle-class population, HUD also understands that the form of the housing needs to more closely resemble the middle-class's preferred exemplar of the single-family home. Both ideologically and symbolically, the physical form of public housing is linked to the underlying goals of the program and how HUD wishes the housing to be perceived.¹²

With the change in housing typology comes a significant reduction in overall housing densities, often to the point where the project is considerably less dense than the surrounding context and, as a result, is again easily identifiable. In addition, the treatment of the building façade is important to the transformation. With the new project, the façades are designed to mimic the diversity of façades found in the neighborhood. No longer treated as uniform slabs, a distinction is made between the front of the building and the back, in an attempt to distinguish between a building's more

public versus private side. In addition to the architectural changes, new streets are woven through the projects, simultaneously breaking down the superblocks and reconnecting the project to the neighborhood. Housing units are again aligned to face the new streets, rather than the internal courtyards as before.

In addition to transforming the physical form, there are a number of other ways public housing is being re-imaged. Often essential to the transformation is the change in the project's name. Just as earlier projects were named in such a way as to erase any reminders of prior slum neighborhoods, the new mixed-income communities are renamed to bring distance between the former "project" and the new community. For example, Henry Horner Homes, a notorious project in Chicago's West Side has been renamed as the "Village at West Haven." "Village" is commonly used in the renaming of projects illustrating the desire to transform sites formerly known as the "ghetto" or "project" with language more attractive to those able to afford a piece of the American Dream. Often the middle-class families that authorities hope to attract are in search of the kind of balance between community and country that villages are known for – even if the "village" in this case only exists in the name.

As will be explored in greater detail in the coming chapters, in imaging and then re-imaging public housing, there are many different ways the image transformation is achieved. Through a combination of design, marketing and media representation, the "slums" and then the "projects" are transformed at a level much greater than a mere physical analysis alone can explain, although ultimately the results are expressed in the

¹² Lawrence J. Vale, "Symbolic Settlements: The American Ideological Tension Between Private Homes

urban design. As the word “village” suggests, a primary objective with re-imaging is to recapture some of the qualities of pre-modern urban (and not-so-urban) America. As the modern city and its problematic projects have come to symbolize larger societal problems, the need for new symbolism becomes essential in public housing’s transformation. What will be explored further in this thesis is that the product of re-imaging is not simply a return to the conditions existing prior to the construction of modern housing. Rather, the new communities being created are a kind of hybrid between the pre-modern and modern conditions, resulting in communities having a stylistic imagery that evokes the prior neighborhood but with the convenience, comfort, clean aesthetic and automotive accommodation that is expected in the market today: a sort of gentrified portrait of the prior “slum.” However, before one can better understand and appreciate how public housing is being re-imaged in the twenty-first century, one must first understand how the slum was imaged as public housing more than a half century ago.

2

Imaging Early Modern Housing

There is no immediate aim of the American people ... more widely supported and more insistently voiced than the desire to attack the social evils of the slums and to provide decent living quarters for ... the underprivileged.¹³

Report for the United States Housing Act of 1937,
Senate Committee on Education and Labor



¹³ United States Housing Authority (USHA), *What the Housing Act Can Do For Your City* (Washington, DC, 1938), n.p.

The Imaging of Early Public Housing

While the current image of public housing may be of large deteriorated developments with extremely poor and distressed residents, the image of public housing when it was first built was something quite different. In fact, the earliest public housing projects were viewed as the antithesis of the deteriorating conditions that existed in the “slums” they sought to replace. Public housing was imbued with a sense of optimism and hope that it would not again attain until very recently under the HOPE VI program. Although public housing today is usually associated with very large developments, and often high-rise towers, the earliest projects were relatively small in scale and comprised of less visible low-rise buildings. Even so, the urban design of these earlier projects represented a noticeable break from the fabric of the city in order to achieve the reformist goals common among public housing advocates at the time. In order to understand the imaging of early public housing as it is contrasted to the slum conditions existing prior, this chapter will explore the federal mechanisms that led to the clearance of slums and the eventual construction of public housing; the marketing devices used by both public and private entities; and finally, some of the design objectives of architects and planners.

Legislating Public Housing

The first public housing built in America was a product of the Great Depression and the New Deal and was, by implication, born out of progressive ideals. The earliest projects were built in 1933 by the Public Works Administration (PWA). Illustrating the optimistic *zeitgeist* regarding public housing is the following quote, taken from President Franklin Roosevelt's dedication at the opening of Techwood Homes in Atlanta, one of the first publicly funded projects in the country:

Within sight of us today stands a tribute to useful work under government supervision – the first slum clearance and low-rent housing project. Within a very short time, people who never before could get a decent roof over their heads will live here in reasonable comfort and healthful, worthwhile surroundings.¹⁴

A few years later, the US Congress passed the United States Housing Act of 1937, which is the piece of legislation that created the current structure of the public housing program. The Housing Act called for the elimination of unsafe and unsanitary slums, the production of decent affordable housing, the reduction of unemployment and the support of the housing industry. This last point is important, for housing does not appear to have been the immediate objective; rather, as part of the PWA's job-creation mandate, the construction of public housing was merely a by-product, a means to the end of creating jobs and lifting the working class out of poverty. Thus, the objectives of the federal government's housing program were manifold and not necessarily centered around providing housing for the poor. The program reinforced the housing reform

objectives of the time through the requirement of “equivalent elimination,” which meant that for every unit of new public housing built, a slum unit had to be destroyed. Written into the legislation was a clear bias for reform through complete demolition and reconstruction rather than through more gradual means. It was generally believed that extreme measures needed to be taken in order to solve not only the housing problem but also the social ills of the slums: “Furthermore, housing advocates believed that the combination of well-designed housing and the elimination of tenements would alleviate social problems.”¹⁵ The one-for-one replacement of substandard housing also tentatively mitigated the concerns of private builders, who were concerned that increases in new government construction would have created a massive oversupply in the market, leading to sharply reduced profits for private builders.

As suggested above, the first public housing was not primarily envisioned as a remedy to urban blight, but rather as part of the wider New Deal economic strategy. Nor was it necessarily built for the city’s poorest residents, but rather for the working poor. Since public housing was expected to be self-supporting, not including the initial development costs, the rents were set at a level that would cover the project’s operating costs. The level of rent, therefore, ensured a tenant base that excluded the very poor out of hand, arguably those most in need of public housing. Given that the market for public housing originally consisted of working families, it is less surprising to discover that opposition to

¹⁴ Atlanta Housing Authority, *Techwood Homes: 50 Years of Growth, Hope and Progress* (Atlanta, 1986), n.p. Implied by the phrase *useful work* is unemployment relief.

¹⁵ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the American Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 227.

its provision and placement was less than one would find today.¹⁶ Furthermore, since the racial profile of tenants for the new housing was required to follow that of the neighborhood – for example, no blacks would be admitted into public housing in all-white neighborhoods – fears of forced racial integration were effectively diffused. Since there was no stigma yet attached to public housing, the demand for subsidized housing was great among low- to middle-income families looking for decent affordable housing.

The objective of creating much-needed jobs in construction further aided the general public's acceptance of the program, since it was viewed as a way to help out one of the industries that had suffered the most during the Great Depression. It was estimated that one third of the unemployed were in the building trades.¹⁷ Some critics of the program's intent have argued that helping the poor was only a minor goal of public housing philosophy and that President Roosevelt had given cautious support to the program only after he realized that it would create much-needed employment. Whatever the intent, 160,000 units were built during the first phase of public housing construction between 1936 and 1940.¹⁸

Marketing Early Public Housing

Early public housing was marketed, or “spun,” in the media in two very different ways. At one extreme, it was portrayed positively by housing authorities and advocates and by

¹⁶ Although the opposition was less than today, it is important to note there still was opposition to the taking of homes and businesses.

¹⁷ Wright, 220.

¹⁸ US Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Historical and Baseline Assessment* (Washington, DC, 1996), p. 1-2.

private enterprise that sought to benefit financially as the uplifting of the urban poor. At the other extreme, it was presented by the private housing industry and other opponents of public housing as socialistic and un-American, and inferior to the American Dream of owning one's home. In either case, the concept of public housing was something radically different from anything America had been accustomed to. Happening concurrently as well as prior to housing built under the USHA, architects and planners were experimenting with new forms of housing that was designed to open up and breathe fresh air and light into the congested and chaotic conditions of the nineteenth-century city. Not only did the image of the new housing come to symbolize a slum transformed, but it also fueled greater experimentation in public housing design. Thus, as will be examined further when looking at the design, there was a cyclical relationship between the marketing and design of public housing.

In a pamphlet produced by the USHA in 1938 titled *What the Housing Act Can Do for Your City*, the benefits of public housing for the overall well-being of the city are expounded and, according to USHA administrator Nathan Straus, with the full support of the general public: "...citizens are supporting their own local housing and slum clearance programs, not merely with passive approval but also by study and real work."¹⁹ Of course, one always has to ask who the actual citizens were who supported the program,

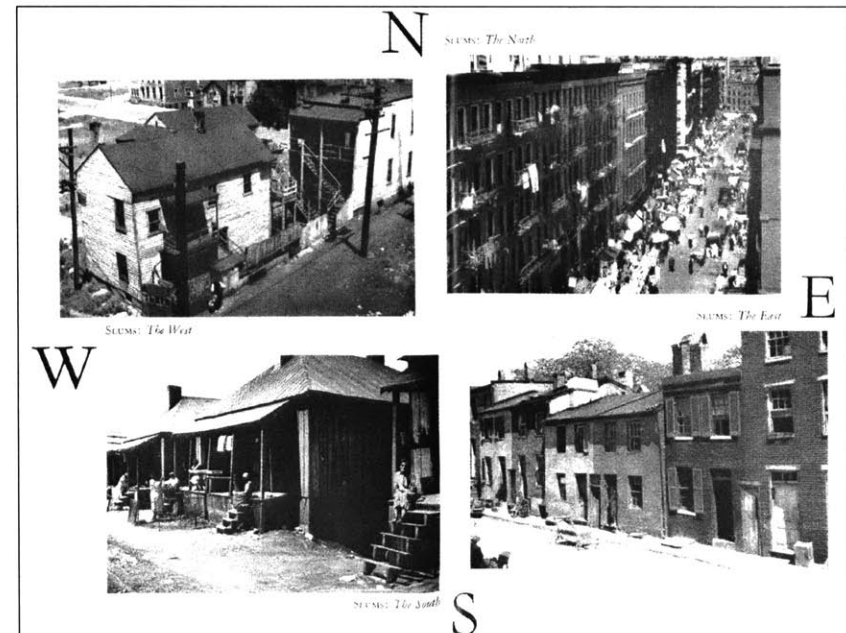


Fig. 2.1 Slums all over the country as presented by the USHA in 1938.

¹⁹ USHA.

since they are not likely to have been those who were living happily in the neighborhoods that were designated to be demolished. In the pamphlet, images of slums are presented from all ends of the country. (Fig. 2.1) The image of the slum in “The North” is especially intriguing because it portrays a lively street with what appears to be an outdoor market, and not necessarily the image of decay and despair that the pamphlet would have one believe. Sets of images are also used to contrast the before and after scenarios of slums to public housing. (Fig. 2.2) This pairing of extreme contrasts becomes a favorite marketing device that appears over and over again in annual reports of both federal and local housing authorities.

In addition to the actual images, the text is written in a way that evokes an image of the slum’s dire conditions, and is meant to provoke immediate action. The following paragraph appears in the chapter entitled *Does Your City Need Public Housing?*:

A housewife calling to get her laundry, finds the laundress’ baby sick of a serious contagious disease in the same dark room with the sheets and table linen going out to homes all over the city. A banker, turning down a loan, suddenly realizes that three-quarters of his city is no longer “sound” for residential investment. A child is run over – Why? Because his mother chased him out of the stuffy flat to play, and there was nowhere to go but the street.²⁰

Scare tactics like these were viewed as essential to rally support for a national public housing program. As one housing supporter later commented, “It may have been the wrong technique but it did get housing started. I wonder where we’d be today if we had



Stanley Holmes Village, Atlantic City, before and after.

Fig. 2.2 Before and after images of Stanley Holmes Village in Atlantic City.

²⁰ USHA.

not scared (the hell) out of people about conditions in the slums, and would have just talked about beautiful little cottages with white picket fences around them.”²¹

Throughout the country, local housing authorities were offering up the same types of images, at once proclaiming the virtues of public housing and denouncing the ills of the slums, while at the same time attracting federal dollars. In the 1943/1944 report for the Atlanta Housing Authority, public housing is made an essential part of “what makes a city great” because it can help make Atlanta more like “...the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome...” by housing the people that make the city vibrant.²² Techwood Homes, now under the management of the housing authority, is presented as one of the “beauty spots” that “are blossoming throughout the eight Atlanta housing projects.” (Fig. 2.3) A set of before and after images shows how Techwood Homes transformed a blighted street into “a broad tree-lined street attractive to all beholders.” The after image illustrates the primacy of landscaping in the new public housing project. (Fig. 2.4) Before and after interior views are also commonly used with special attention given to the kitchen and bathroom, since these rooms had the potential of being the most decrepit on one extreme or the most modern on the other. This report shows how both the kitchen and bedrooms could be transformed. The caption for the bedrooms reads “gloomy bed rooms, badly-lit and impossible to keep tidy and clean, have been replaced for these families by sunny, cheerful, clean and inspiring quarters.” (Fig. 2.5) Little visible change from one room to the next somehow makes the difference between “gloomy” and “cheerful.”



Fig. 2.3 View of Techwood Homes in Atlanta in 1944.



Fig. 2.4 View of Techwood Homes in Atlanta in 1944.



Fig. 2.5 “Gloomy” to “cheerful” bedrooms.

²¹ Alexander von Hoffman, “A Study in Contradictions: The Origins and Legacy of the Housing Act of 1949,” *Housing Policy Debate* 2000, Volume 11, Issue 2: pp. 299-326.

²² Atlanta Housing Authority, *Building A Greater Atlanta* (Atlanta, 1944), p. 4.

In Pittsburgh, the visual and literary images were no less compelling. In *The First Seven Years*, the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh takes pride in elevating slum dwellers to the tops of surrounding hills when in reality it was simultaneously removing the unwanted from the central city in the valley: “Washington would be amazed to see this upward migration from the bottom lands, with children playing in the sunny, smoke-free altitudes that until a few years ago were enjoyed only by goats.”²³ An image appears with the caption, “Mrs. Mildred Russell weeding her zinnies at Addison Terrace.” (Fig. 2.6) Rather than fronting onto the street, the architecture fronts onto a park interspersed with tenant-grown gardens. Under the section *Community Living*, a “sunny workshop” provides a place for “boys at Allequippa Terrace” to be productive. (Fig. 2.7) The underlying message being that the housing project, with its amenities, will produce better, more productive citizens by keeping them away from the troubled city streets. Like Atlanta, much of Pittsburgh was earmarked for demolition. According to the report by the Housing Authority, roughly 60% of the city’s homes were considered substandard.²⁴

Not just by the public authorities, imaging the new projects was also an objective of private enterprise that served to benefit in some way. In a pamphlet advertisement for Revere Copper and Brass Incorporated from 1944 titled *Uplifting the Downtrodden*, modern housing is presented as the savior of the urban poor. The cover image shows what is presumably a mother and her four children, living in the slums looking with excitement toward a modern high-rise project encroaching in the distance. (Fig. 2.8)



Fig. 2.6 Tenant gardening at Addison Terrace in Pittsburgh.



Fig. 2.7 Boys' workshop at Allequippa Terrace.

²³ Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, *The First Seven Years* (Pittsburgh, 1945), p. 3.

The observer knows that the foreground is a slum, with laundry hanging out to dry and a balcony piled high with garbage, and that the family appears to be ethnic and un-bathed. In contrast, the new housing project in the distance – on the other side of the highway – is shown to be pristine, white and modern, and is surrounded by a park filled with plenty of trees and children playing. An image inside the pamphlet shows an aerial view of the superblock with all of its open space carved out of the very dense urban fabric, which appears to be primarily in shadow. (Fig. 2.9) The text reads:

It is my hope that thousands of Americans will study with stimulation Mr. Lescaze's proposal to eliminate slums through building groups of "superblocks." For, regardless of the specific advantages of any one solution to the problem, surely everyone will agree with Mr. Lescaze's basic contention as to the necessity of freeing increasing millions of Americans now penned up in slums and providing them at a minimum rental with sun, air, space, in ample proportion for the enjoyment of life.²⁵

The real objective of the Revere company is eventually revealed:

Revere does not build houses. It does not plan to erect "superblocks." In presenting Mr. Lescaze's project...we are merely endeavoring to make a contribution to post-war living. Yet we must acknowledge one fact: we know that if our hopes for better low-cost housing come true, the use of copper must increase.²⁶



Fig. 2.8 Cover image for Revere Copper and Brass Incorporated brochure, 1944.



Fig. 2.9 Mr. Lescaze's solution for the slums.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Revere Copper and Brass Incorporated, *Uplifting the Downtrodden* (Jan. 10, 1944), p. 2. William Lescaze was also the architect for the PSFS Building in Philadelphia. Built in 1931, it was one of the first modern high-rise buildings in the country.

²⁶ Revere, 15.

In almost all of the marketing materials, creating safe places for children is of utmost importance. Understanding that many of the families who seek more affordable housing have children, the imagery used is often targeting their concerns. A Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) pamphlet entitled *Facts About Public Housing in Chicago* includes pages filled with images of children in public housing. One page has the title “Children’s Cities Replace Shabby Hovels.”²⁷ (Fig. 2.10) In a 1947 CHA report, the Authority notes that the families who live in the city’s public housing have about 18,000 children and that more than 90% of the families have children. According to the report, children affect the developments in many ways: “in the design of the buildings and of the individual living units, in the handling of grounds, and the planning of activities.”²⁸ Creating safe places for children to play was one of the primary objectives of the superblock. It simultaneously created more open space for children to run and play and removed many of the interior streets, which were then viewed as potentially hazardous and superfluous urban elements.

At the other extreme, public housing was not always presented in a positive way and was, in fact, strongly opposed by individuals and organizations representing the private housing market. The private real estate industry, for example, attempted to paint a picture of public housing as inferior to private homeownership. Beginning many years before the first public housing project was ever built, organizations such as the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) were promoting images of the single-family home as morally superior to apartment living. In 1922, NAREB’s *A Home of Your Own* featured such images as one claiming that homeownership “puts the MAN back in



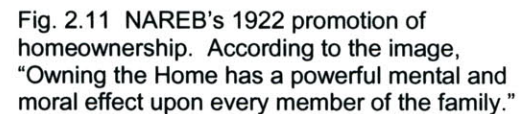
Fig. 2.10 “Children’s cities replace shabby hovels” in Chicago.

²⁷ Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), *Facts about Public Housing in Chicago* (Chicago, June 1947), n.p.

Affordable Utopias: Design Objectives of Early Public Housing

²⁸ CHA, 32.

²⁹ Lawrence J. Vale, "Symbolic Settlements: The American Ideological Tension Between Private Homes and Public Housing" (Unpublished, 2001), p. 11.



housing examples in Europe. One example featured was the new German city of Frankfurt-am-Main (Römerstadt), entirely planned and built between 1925 and 1930. (Fig. 2.13) Throughout the exhibit, the observer is continually asked why America cannot solve its housing problem while countries in Europe can. One analogy is drawn between American housing and machinery:

...we must have a new national viewpoint regarding the value of land and a new basis for the valuation of obsolete construction. In the latter field we have never applied one of our boasted American practices. Foreigners were wont to praise our manufacturers for their willingness to scrap their old or even their comparatively new machinery the minute one came along with a more efficient piece of equipment.³¹

In addition to the images, three actual rooms were set up to contrast an apartment in a modern house with the cramped flats of the old-law tenements.

Many influential figures in both the fields of city planning and architecture contributed to the exhibit's compendium volume, titled *America Can't Have Housing*. One of those figures was Lewis Mumford. He argued, as did many others, for large-scale housing reform. He even argued for large-scale social reform, stressing the need for a more ordered society: "...our problem is to create a new *order* in the environment at large that will encourage and carry further those germinal impulses toward *order* that are latent in various parts of our social heritage."³² Echoing the need for extensive reform, Catherine Bauer wrote "the old methods of providing shelter for people of average



Fig. 2.12 The US Savings and Loan League scare tactic.



Fig. 2.13 The new German city of Frankfurt-am-Main (Römerstadt).

³⁰ Wright, 221.

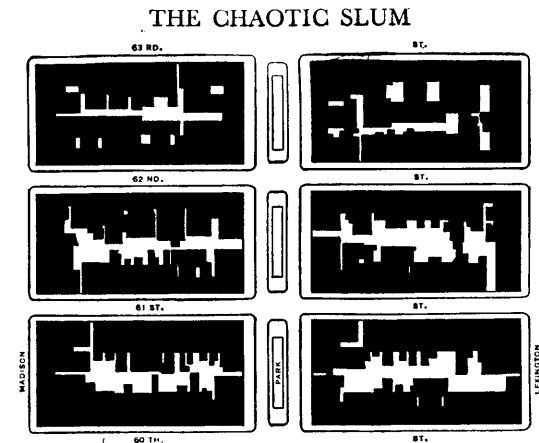
³¹ Carol Aronovici, ed., *America Can't Have Housing* (Committee on the Housing Exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art: New York, 1934), p. 13.

³² Ibid., 17. (Emphasis on order added.)

income or less are today so thoroughly unworkable and obsolete that any positive attempt to solve the housing problem can only be achieved by drastic measures. No backdoor or half-way measures will do the job anymore.”

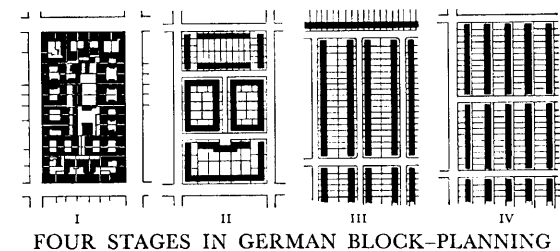
Published in the same year as the exhibit, Bauer’s *Modern Housing* revealed her preference for modern architecture and urbanism. Within the first part of her book titled *Nineteenth-Century Cities: A Record of Failure*, she uses figure-ground drawings to illustrate what she perceived to be the inadequacies of the nineteenth century block. In one drawing labeled “The Chaotic Slum,” she presented six blocks abutting Park Avenue in New York City with the following caption: “This is not, as one might suppose, the plan of some ancient shambles, long torn down. It is the present layout of a wealthy residential section of New York City; Park Avenue in the East Sixties. Patrick Geddes would have called it a Super-Slum.” (Fig. 2.14) Later in the book Bauer upholds the German superblock, or *Zeilenbau*, as the model to follow with American modern housing. (Fig. 2.15) Clearly, the momentum was building that would eventually necessitate radical change and experimentation in the design of housing for the poor.

As demonstrated by Bauer, many looked to Europe to give form to modern housing, since planners and architects there had been experimenting with social housing for some time. Thanks to the MoMA exhibit, the housing innovations of Europe were made more accessible to the designers here at home. One of the most influential imports was the father of the German Bauhaus, Walter Gropius. A few years later, Gropius himself would come to the United States to head up the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University from 1937 to 1952, coinciding with the period in which much of American



This is not, as one might suppose, the plan of some ancient shambles, long torn down. It is the present layout of a wealthy residential section of New York City; Park Avenue in the East Sixties. Patrick Geddes would have called it a Super-Slum.

Fig. 2.14 Bauer’s “chaotic slum” along Park Avenue.



I. is the typical 19th-century block, with rear buildings. II. shows smaller blocks with buildings all around the perimeter. III. has open-ended rows facing each other across traffic streets. IV. is a diagram of *Zeilenbau*, with the rows endward to the street and all facing in the same direction. From *Das Neue Frankfurt*.

Fig. 2.15 The block transformation to the superblock.

public housing was designed and built. For the MoMA exhibit, Gropius contributed an essay titled *Minimum Dwellings and Tall Buildings*. In the essay, he presented his views toward achieving the absolute “minimum amount of space, air, light, warmth and elbow room required by human beings.” Reflecting how many modern architects and planners searched for scientific reasoning for their designs, Gropius concluded, “Under good conditions of light and air human beings, biologically speaking, need only a very small space to live in.” In order to attain the appropriate conditions of light and air, Gropius declared that apartment buildings should only be one apartment deep in order to achieve the appropriate cross-ventilation and double exposure necessary. Ultimately, he argued for the *Zeilenbau* approach in planning public housing: “Sufficient lighting and equal exposure to the sun for all dwellings means open planning in rows or strips of apartments and a sufficient open space between these strips. Interior courts and narrow streets which take away light and air are a crime.”³³

In addition to the superblock, Gropius and his German counterparts also promoted the use of tall buildings. According to Gropius, “The high land values have made the single house an absurdity.” Again giving scientific reasoning to support his argument he proposed, “after careful sociological and economic research, ten to twelve story apartment houses for the thickly settled districts in our cities.” Finally, Gropius’ tower-in-the-park vision of the future city is presented:

The tall apartment house gives us the possibility of building widely-spaced, airy, green cities, and we can, moreover, build them with financial profit.

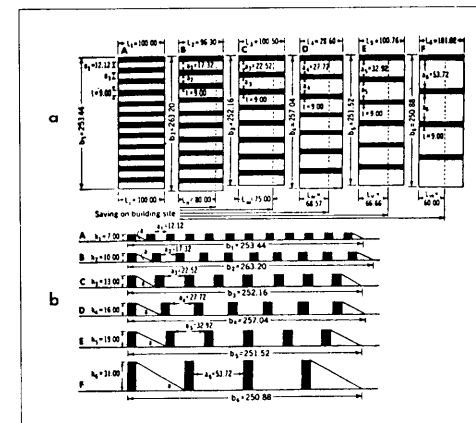


Fig. 2.16 Gropius diagram illustrating the relationship between building height and open space.

³³ Ibid., 41.

Instead of looking out at narrow backyards or hallways as is the case with three or four story buildings he will see a green space with trees, which could serve as a playground for his children. Thus nature penetrates the large city.³⁴

Included in Gropius' essay is the now-famous diagram illustrating how the conditions of air, sun, view and distance are improved with increased height in the building. (Fig. 2.16)

Although the architecture of early public housing would not reach the extreme heights promoted by Gropius, the site design often represented a fairly radical departure from the existing urban fabric, and would incorporate many of the *Zeilenbau* principles. Rather than merely providing shelter for the poor, designers saw this as an opportunity to create entire self-contained communities. Unlike earlier PWA projects, the site design of public housing was moving toward having more open space. In the first annual report of the Atlanta Housing Authority, the proposed plans for new housing are printed on transparent paper and are laid over the existing conditions (Fig. 2.17) Like the figure-ground drawings in *Modern Housing*, the proposed plans illustrate the preference for parallel slab housing in a superblock over the more traditional fabric of the existing neighborhood. Another example to look at is the Lenox Street project in Boston. Parallel bands of three-story housing replace the densely developed pattern of the Lenox Street area of Roxbury. (Fig. 2.18) The highly geometrical pattern of housing purposely breaks from the dense fabric existing in the surrounding context. Streets are removed and continuous paths of open space are woven throughout the site. Although the building height, exterior finish and vertical punched windows match that of the

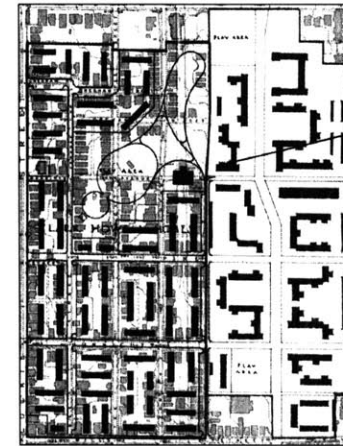


Fig. 2.17 From traditional fabric to superblock in Atlanta public housing.

³⁴ Ibid., 42.

surrounding context, the arrangement of the buildings on the site and the architectural repetition makes the project highly distinguishable.

In *A Citizen's Guide to Public Housing*, Catherine Bauer writes about how with public housing, one of the great architectural opportunities of our time exists "to create the first sound and creative architectural vernacular we have seen in a hundred and fifty years (since the New England village, for instance...)"³⁵ Not only was there vocal optimism surrounding the idea of public housing philosophically, but also in its design potential. Bauer observes that even though the design of early public housing is better than the average speculative development and "glamorous by contrast with the slums," she argues that the designs so far have been "rather dull" and that architects should look to projects such as Greenbelt, Maryland for inspiration.³⁶ Returning to the USHA pamphlet, *What the Housing Act Can Do for Your City*, the Greenbelt example appears again and is contrasted to an image of children playing in an inner-city street (Fig. 2.19) The caption for the pairing reads: "Children turned loose on the streets find only idleness, frustration and danger, but in Greenbelt, Maryland, family life is developed in healthful, protected surroundings." The images together illustrate the bias for protected green space over the dangers of unprotected streets for public gathering. The contrast is also telling in the way the architecture of Greenbelt is featured equally as much as the family in the foreground as compared to the absence of architecture in the more urban example. With the new residential communities, housing is now designed by architects and becomes more expressive as opposed to housing in the nineteenth-



Fig. 2.18a Before: traditional row houses along Lenox Street .



Fig. 2.18b After: modern Lenox Street housing project.

³⁵ Catherine Bauer, *A Citizen's Guide to Public Housing* (Poughkeepsie: Vassar College Press, 1940), p.

62.

³⁶ Ibid.

century city, which was simply built as needed and was embedded into the fabric of the city.

Bringing nature into the city is a primary objective for all of the earlier public housing projects, as a way to bring relief to the urban congestion of the slum and to maximize open space. Initially, the open space was semi-enclosed within the architecture. This was often the case with earlier PWA projects and their courtyard configurations, but over time the relationship would reverse itself and the architecture would become enveloped by the open space.³⁷ According to a recent study of public housing site design, the trend toward more open space followed an increasingly anti-urban stance: "Nature, as represented by expanses of lawn to be only partly encumbered by buildings or programmatic functions was seen as good while the city as represented by buildings on streets was bad (with all the moral and aesthetic overtones these adjectives imply)." Seen in this way, nature and open space are an important element in the imaging of the slums to public housing. Returning to the image of Techwood Homes that appeared in the 1943 Atlanta Housing Authority report, nature features more prominently than the architecture. The housing itself is almost completely hidden behind the "broad tree-lined street." (Fig. 2.4)

Since many of the earlier projects were examples of "demonstration housing," which meant they were built to illustrate the difference between good housing and slum housing, the architectural design was of relatively high quality. Public housing was

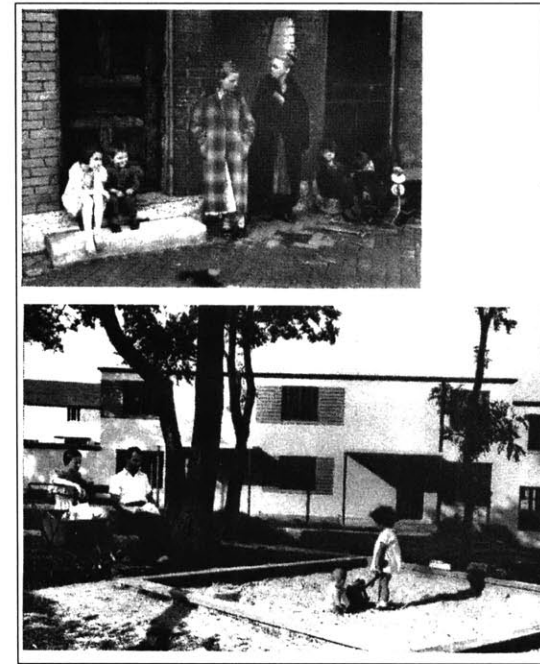


Fig. 2.19 From the slums to Greenbelt, Maryland. The image illustrates the USHA's preference for a more suburban solution to the urban slum.

³⁷ Karen A. Franck and Michael Mostoller, "From Courts to Open Space to Streets: Changes in the Site Design of U.S. Public Housing," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 12, 3 (Autumn 1995), p. 202.

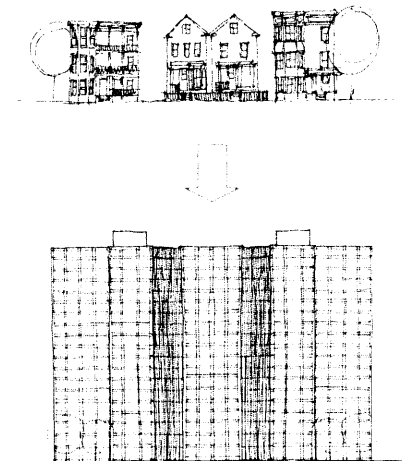
viewed by its supporters as far superior to the housing existing on the site prior to slum clearance. The architecture was similar in scale to other housing in the neighborhood consisting of low-rise townhouses or walk-up apartments, but the style of building followed the more minimalist aesthetic of early modernism for both practical and stylistic reasons. Although minimalist in design, the buildings were usually built to last, incorporating the best in construction and materials. The sturdy construction was another way the projects could be distinguished from the less sturdy slum housing existing on the site before.

3

Imaging the Vertical Ghetto

It follows that well-organized, modern high-rise apartment blocks cannot be considered a necessary evil; they are a biologically motivated type of dwelling, a genuine by-product of our age. The objections of one-sided defenders of one-family house construction on the grounds that the nature of man roots him to the soil (an assertion entirely lacking scientific proof) is in direct conflict with the intuitive preference of many persons who feel particularly at home in an elevated apartment because they prefer the greater peace in upper stories (no noise from street or playgrounds) and the unobstructed view.

Scope of Total Architecture,
Walter Gropius



The Imaging of High-Rise Public Housing

With the Housing Act of 1949 came a more vigorous attack against the slums and, more generally, against the urban form of the nineteenth-century city. The contrast between the image of the slums and the image of public housing became more extreme as the architecture of public housing became more extreme. The preference for higher-density and high-rise forms of housing were more common, especially in cities like Chicago, New York and Baltimore, where the cost of land was increasing in step with the demand for more affordable housing. Imaging during this second period of public housing development sought to extol the virtues of high-rise living while encouraging further exploration in the design of affordable high-rise buildings. With the new Housing Act placing greater emphasis on urban redevelopment, this period saw more imagery devoted toward combating the growth of slums and bringing order to what was otherwise viewed as chaotic and anti-modern. Much more extreme measures were taken in the marketing and design of large sections of the city, ultimately pushing for more slum clearance and, as a result, more public housing.

Concentrating Poverty: Shift in Legislative Goals

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the initial opposition to public housing came primarily from the private housing industry. Beginning with the Housing Act of 1949, otherwise known as the Wagner-Ellender-Taft bill, the public housing program shifted its target toward lower-income families in response to increasing pressures from such groups as the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) and the National

Association of Home Builders (NAHB). The Act set a 20% gap between the upper income limits for public housing and the lowest incomes at which the private market was providing a supply of decent housing, effectively erasing any competition that might have existed between them. Moreover, the Act established the rule of evicting tenants whose incomes rose above a set limit. Although not always enforced, it was another way of keeping those able to afford housing in the private market out of public housing. Finally, the Act introduced the concept of preferences by giving top priority to those displaced by slum clearance.

In addition, while federal laws regarding public housing became more restrictive, other alternative types of housing became available for moderate-income families. Through the efforts of both the Federal Housing Administration and the Federal Highway Administration, it became easier for working-class families to own homes in the suburbs. In fact, already by 1949, a majority of the nation's households were homeowners. The national homeownership rate had jumped to 55% by 1950, which was a significant increase from 43.6% in 1940.³⁸ All of these factors, including more restrictive laws for public housing and lessened barriers to private homeownership, combined to make suburban housing more attractive to moderate-income households than public housing.

In addition to changes in the laws for public housing, the Housing Act of 1949 also established a program for urban redevelopment. Title I of the Act authorized \$1 billion

³⁸ Sylvia C. Martinez, "The Housing Act of 1949: Its Place in the Realization of the American Dream of homeownership," *Housing Policy Debate* Vol. 11, Issue 2 (2000) pp. 467-484.

in loans to help cities acquire slums and blighted land for public or private redevelopment. Together with the Act's optimistic goal of building 810,000 new low-rent public housing units over the next six years, the stage had been set for massive public intervention well into the next decade. To intensify the need, the demand for decent housing escalated in the years following World War II. An already existing shortage of decent affordable housing was exacerbated by urban renewal, when much of the city's more affordable housing stock was demolished. The scale of public housing built following the war reflected this great demand. High-rise housing became a preferred typology in some cities because it could accommodate many more housing units on the same piece of land, thus reducing the total cost of development – or so it was believed. Moreover, from an operational point of view, high-rise housing was believed to be more efficient, in that it consolidated many of the services and utilities under one roof. In actuality, the cost of high-rise housing, factoring in the cost of the land, construction and maintenance required, was often more expensive than a low-rise solution would have been. However, despite its shortcomings, the growing momentum for the high-rise typology resulted in it becoming the preferred type by some housing authorities and their architects.

Marketing the Shift to High-Rise Housing

The contrast between the image of the slums and the image of public housing became more extreme following the Housing Act of 1949. As public housing took on a more monumental form and its architecture became distinctly modern, its image contrasts to a much greater degree with the more traditional images used to represent the slums.

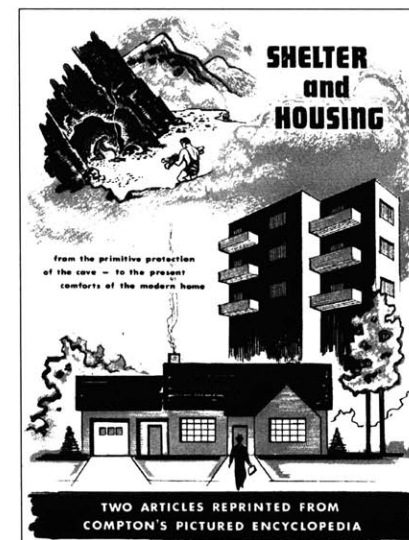


Fig. 3.1 From the cave to modern home and housing.

Public housing is often symbolized by the modern city while the slum is symbolized by the traditional nineteenth-century city. Fueled by the desire to attract new funds available for urban redevelopment, cities and their housing authorities began to scout out all possible areas for demolition. In many of the authority reports, large sections of cities are highlighted as possible locations for demolition and public housing.

A series of images taken from articles reprinted from the *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia* serves to illustrate how public housing was presented in the mainstream media in the early 1950's. The cover of the collection shows how modern housing is the latest in the natural evolution of human shelter, "from the primitive protection of the cave – to the present comforts of the modern home." (Fig. 3.1) A mid-rise public housing building is presented side-by-side with a typical detached single-family home as the modern versions of the primitive cave. An inside image shows "how shelter has developed through the ages" beginning with the cave, then the primitive hut and finally ending with an image of the construction of modern housing. (Fig. 3.2) In the article, "Providing Housing for America's Millions," before and after images like the ones used by housing authorities appear with the headings "Poor housing handicaps many children" and "Good housing helps produce good citizens." (Fig. 3.3) The text reads:

The lack of sunlight and ventilation in city slums makes their inhabitants an easy prey to disease. Inadequate sanitary facilities, overcrowding, flies and vermin help spread disease rapidly through entire areas. Old and dimly-lighted stairways and halls also produce a high accident rate in the home.³⁹



Fig. 3.2 How shelter has developed through the ages.



Fig. 3.3 Poor housing handicaps children whereas good housing produces good citizens.

³⁹ "Shelter and Housing," *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia* (Chicago: F.E. Compton & Company, 1951), p. 431.

Another image illustrates how blight overtakes a neighborhood. (Fig. 3.4) Although the progression of images represents a shift away from the ideal, the final image is not

quite the image of neighborhood blight the author implies. Simply stated and provocative, the text and images together are meant to provide a quick snapshot for the housing novice.

The city of Chicago offers some of the most remarkable examples of the type of image transformation common following the Housing Act of 1949. Although some of the images will be reviewed here, a more detailed review of Chicago's public housing will be offered in Chapter 9 on Cabrini-Green. The first image appears in a report by the Metropolitan Housing Council in Chicago and illustrates how the slums can be "reclaimed" by modern housing. (Fig. 3.5) Titled *Reclaiming Chicago's Blighted Areas*, the report's cover image shows a flower that is rooted in the slums blossoming into an image of a modern house. The cover of the Chicago Housing Authority 1950

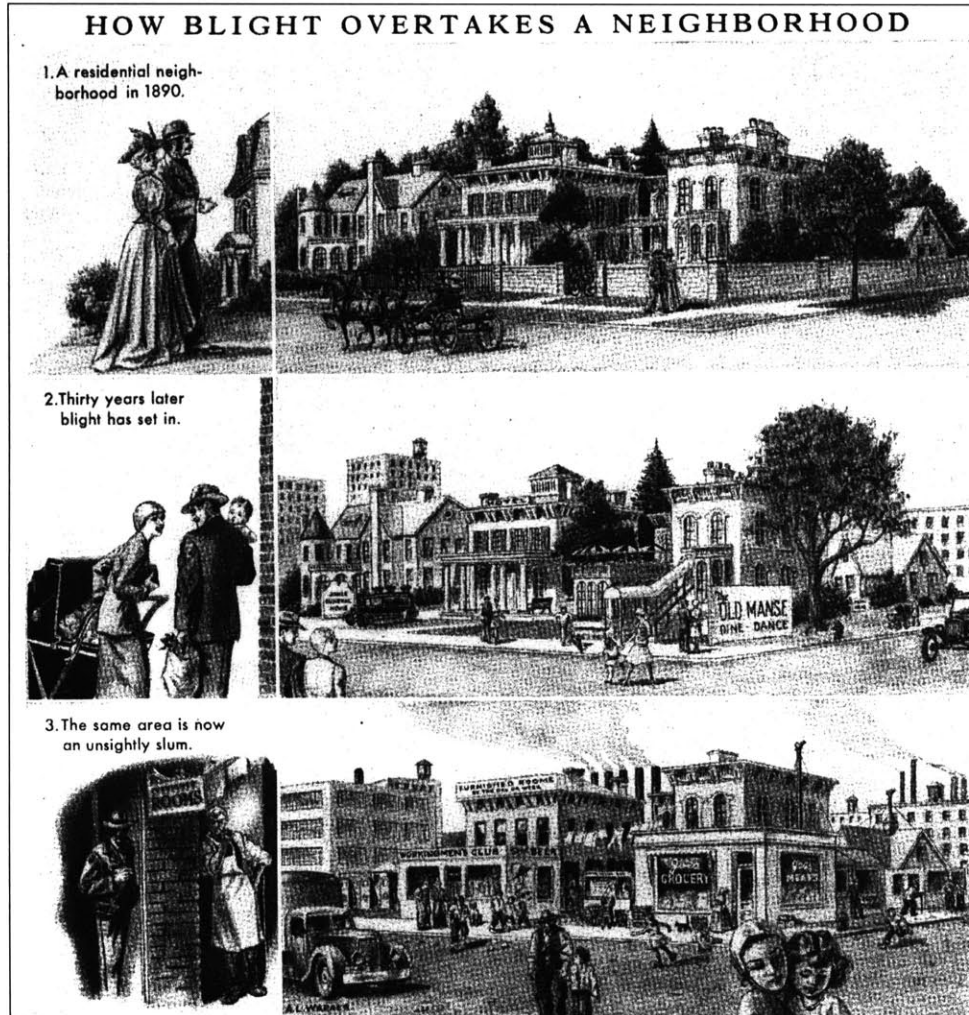


Fig. 3.4 An image of a genteel neighborhood in 1890 is transformed into an "unsightly slum". The "slum" is represented by the addition of nonresidential uses – mainly industrial, as indicated by the smokestacks. Also evident in the "slum" are children playing in the streets since they presumably have nowhere else to go.

Annual Report boldly states “Chicago Can Build.” (Fig. 3.6) In support of the statement, the cover image shows a blueprint of what appears to be a design for public housing unrolled and covering up an image of the old industrial city. In the background image, all of the indicators of the industrial city and its slums are present: smokestacks spewing forth black clouds and densely packed row houses with clothes hanging out to dry. It is an image of urban chaos that is about to change at the hands of the Housing Authority’s architect. Inside, the image transformation is even more explicit. One graphic is particularly revealing. The image represents the Gold Coast as a wall of mid-to high-rise buildings with a central tree-lined boulevard, while the slums or “the dirty backyard” are represented as a mix of three- to four-story row houses.⁴⁰ (Fig. 3.7) Order and height represent the modern city whereas variety and low-rise buildings represent the slum.

The cover of a 1950 Annual Report for the Baltimore Housing Authority shows a cartoon of an authoritative figure, presumably someone working for the Authority, watching over a public housing development. (Fig. 3.8) Keeping an eye on tenants and securing order in the project are prime concerns of the Authority. Inside the report, the figure reappears, asking the question: “What happens if people don’t keep their place in good order?”⁴¹ The answer is simple: he will be evicted. However, what constitutes “good order” is not as clear. Examples of good order are offered through a series of images like the one two showing children working in the project’s gardens with the caption “Children have their job to do.”⁴² (Fig. 3.9) Returning to Atlanta, a 1951 Report



Fig. 3.5 Reclaiming the slums in Chicago through modern design, 1947.



Fig. 3.6 The CHA's blueprint for rebuilding Chicago.

⁴⁰ CHA, *Chicago Can Build* (Chicago, 1950), n.p.

⁴¹ Baltimore Housing Authority, *Annual Report* (Baltimore, 1950), p. 12.

⁴² Ibid.

entitled “Steps Toward a Brighter Future” has an image of the slums with a stairway leading to the city of the future. (Fig. 3.10) Again, the slums are represented by one- to three- story row houses or detached single-family homes and the city of the future is presented as a glistening skyline of high-rise buildings surrounded by a grid of elevated highways.

Designing the Vertical Ghetto

Whereas in early public housing some of the characteristics of the architecture were more in keeping with those found in the abutting neighborhoods, for public housing built after the 1949 Act, the architecture became much more radical in comparison. At a time when the suburbs were becoming overtaken by families seeking the American Dream of owning a single-family home, many cities saw the rise of the other ideological extreme. The vision of high-rise housing surrounding by endless open public space promoted by architects such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius was finally realized in public housing. The two extremes exacerbated a growing architectural rift between those who could afford to own and those who could not.

Like Le Corbusier’s *Ville Contemporaine*, the vision for public housing included a combination of low- and high-rise buildings sitting within a sea of landscaped open space. (Fig 3.11) Just as Le Corbusier was reacting to the dark and disordered streets of Paris, “public housers” in America were reacting to similar conditions found in American slums. According to the 1953 Annual Report of the Baltimore Housing Authority, the City of the Future would be:

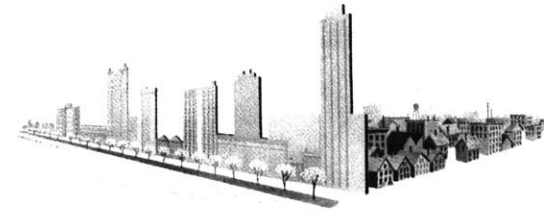


Fig. 3.7 Chicago's Gold Coast and dirty backyard.



Fig. 3.8 Baltimore Housing Authority report.



Fig. 3.9 “Children have their job to do.”

A city where parks and playgrounds will extend to areas where grass is now something that springs up between cracks in the concrete pavement. It will be a city of neighborhoods planned for comfortable, satisfying living. It will be a city where the needs of the people will direct the flow of traffic, not where traffic directs the activities of the people. It will be a city where new schools, with their modern aids to learning, will replace the old and obsolete.⁴³

A supporting image illustrates what the City of the Future will look like. (Fig. 3.12) The dense urban grid of the nineteenth-century city is replaced by superblocks, highways and simple slab housing. Although, not as well-designed or -ordered as Le Corbusier's work, the objective of maximizing public open space is the same.

Even though the form of housing changed dramatically beginning in the 1950's, the ideals behind the design remained essentially the same. According to Wright, "Most housing officials still believed that they could reform poor families by situating them in model environments; but the image of that environment...changed dramatically."⁴⁴ Also, as Wright notes, there was now less rhetoric about building communities and more about enforcing order, as was illustrated through the previous images. The dramatic shift in architecture was not purely out of aesthetic reasons. Rather, it was assumed that a change in scale would help the residents break with their past surroundings and acquaintances. Written by James Ford in 1936, *Slums and Housing* advocated this position by declaring that a project would have an "increased chance of maintaining its distinctive character because its very size helps it to dominate the

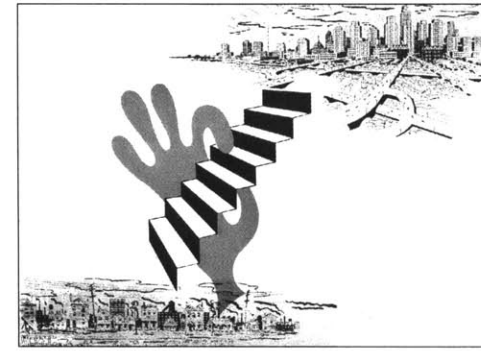


Fig. 3.10 Stepping up to the modern city, 1951.



Fig. 3.11 *Ville Contemporaine*, Le Corbusier.

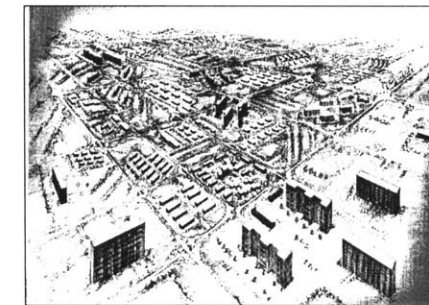


Fig. 3.12 Baltimore's "city of the future".

⁴³ Baltimore Housing Authority, *Annual Report* (Baltimore, 1953), p. 17.

⁴⁴ Wright, 234.

neighborhood and discourage regression”⁴⁵ to slum life. The dominant architecture that Ford advocated was not fully realized until many of the projects built during the 50’s and 60’s.

Elizabeth Wood in Chicago echoed this same view when she announced that planning must be “bold and comprehensive – or it is useless and wasted. If it is not bold, the result will be a series of small projects, islands in a wilderness of slums, beaten down by smoke, noise and fumes.”⁴⁶ It is probably not surprising that in Chicago, with the legacy of Daniel Burnham and his now famous declaration “make no small plans,” bold visions for the design of public housing would be most realized. Throughout the 1950’s and into the 1960’s, the Chicago Housing Authority took the high-rise model to the extreme. For example, the Robert Taylor Homes, which enjoys the dubious distinction of being the largest public housing development in the country, consisting of twenty-eight towers of sixteen stories each stretched over a four-mile section of the city.

Just as soon as public housing began using the high-rise form, both its opponents and supporters alike began to question its appropriateness. Elizabeth Wood, who had earlier been campaigning for more radical intervention, began to doubt her prior assumptions and, in 1961, wrote *Housing Design: A Social Theory*. In the book, she argued that if we must have these forms, then we should at least design them so they are more appropriate for families. She and many others felt that providing clearly defined places for social interactivity would be enough to offset the problems of higher-density living. For example, she believed that providing wider corridors would

⁴⁵ Ibid.

encourage greater interaction between people living in the same building. (Fig. 3.13) Already by 1961, high-rise examples would entail the use of corridors open to the exterior to serve this same purpose and create elevated “streets in the sky.” Again, many of the high-rise projects built in Chicago make use of this design element and will be explored in more detail with the Cabrini-Green case study.

Even the likes of Catherine Bauer, one of public housing’s most vocal proponents, had also begun to question the architectural direction the program had taken. In an article appearing in a 1957 issue of *Architectural Forum*, she questions the way public housing was designed as “islands” that turn “their backs to the surrounding neighborhood.” The fact that public housing had come to be too large and highly standardized tended to make it look institutional and entirely different from their surrounding neighborhoods. She goes on to say that, as a result, “any charity stigma that attaches to subsidized housing is thus reinforced” and that the “resulting degree of rigid social segregation is difficult to align with traditional American ideas.”

Foreshadowing later public housing programs and eventually the HOPE VI program, many of the respondents to Bauer’s article claim that one way to overcome “the dreary deadlock of public housing” was to ensure that “the private builder...be brought into public housing.”⁴⁷ This, they felt, would be one way to combat the stigma that was in part instigated by the private builders. Despite their concerns, the momentum for high-density and high-rise housing was too strong to overturn. Although not the most commonly used typology in the overall landscape of public housing, the high-rise

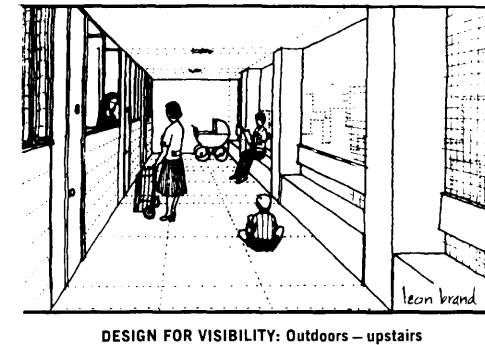


Fig. 3.13 The “street in the sky” brings the “outdoors – upstairs”

⁴⁶ CHA, *Bulletin* Vol. 3 No. 2 (March 1945), n.p.

building would certainly become its most visible symbol, especially once it began to show signs of distress.

No discussion of high-rise public housing would be complete without looking at the now-infamous Pruitt-Igoe project built in St. Louis. In 1950, the St. Louis Housing Authority commissioned the architectural firm of Leinweber, Yamasaki & Hellmuth to design a 2700-unit project intended to house 15,000 tenants at a density on average of 47 dwelling units per acre, which was much higher than the density of the pre-existing slum dwellings. Although the original scheme presented by the architects called for a mixture of high-rise, low-rise and walk-up structures, the cost limitations of the project eventually dictated the final design of 33 eleven-story elevator buildings. (Fig. 3.14) Within these limitations, the architects worked to create “individual neighborhoods” within each building using the then-innovative design moves of skip-stop elevators and glazed internal galleries. The galleries located on every third floor were described as “vertical hallways” and, like the “streets in the sky,” functioned as interior play spaces for children. (Fig. 3.15) Despite the architects’ attempts to create a humane environment, the project’s value engineering began to have a visible effect and the housing authority’s cost-cutting decisions proved to be a colossal mistake. In 1972, less than twenty years after the project was fully inhabited, the St. Louis Housing Authority began to demolish the buildings.

The image of the demolition would have profound effects for both public housing and modern architecture. (Fig. 3.16) For public housing, the image came to symbolize the



Fig. 3.14 Aerial view of Pruitt-Igoe.



Fig. 3.15 Conceptual diagram of interior galleries.



Fig. 3.16 The demolition of Pruitt-Igoe.

⁴⁷ Catherine Bauer, “The Dreary Deadlock of Public Housing,” *Architectural Forum* (May 1957), p. 140.

failure of the program under which the project was built and, to some, it even signified the death of public housing. Since its inception, public housing was inextricably linked to the modern movement, both in ideological and physical terms. The housing program, like the architectural movement, was future-oriented, turning its back to the traditional city in its quest for the affordable utopia. With the failure of Pruitt-Igoe, which in some ways represented the culmination of the housing program, the optimism that few still had for the program's success crumbled along with the buildings.

For modern architecture, the image of Pruitt-Igoe's destruction was equally as devastating. In 1977, Charles Jencks announced that the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe represented the death of modern architecture. The image and the announcement were so compelling that it received unprecedented attention in both the architectural and national press. *Architectural Forum*, *AIA Journal* and *The Architect's Journal*, as well as more mainstream publications such as *Life*, *Time*, *The National Observer* and *The Washington Post*, all ran articles attributing the failure of the project to the architecture. As one author writes, this argument "legitimizes the architecture profession by implying that deeply embedded social problems are caused, and therefore solved, by architectural design."⁴⁸ As the demolition of public housing gains momentum under the HOPE VI program, more than twenty years after Pruitt-Igoe's demise, the question still remains: What role will architecture play in the imaging, or re-imaging, of public housing yet to come?

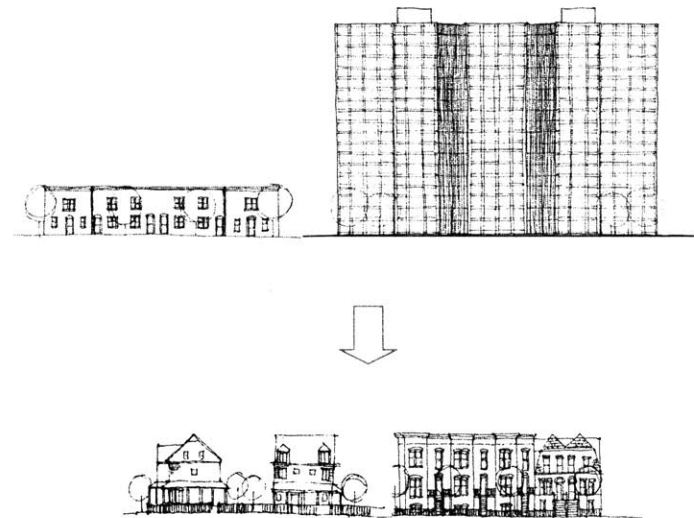
⁴⁸ Katharine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* (May 1991), p. 163.

4

Re-Imaging Public Housing under HOPE VI

If HOPE VI programs fan out across the country as planned, public housing that now resembles Good Times' high-rise Chicago will start to look a lot more like The Andy Griffith Show's front-porch Mayberry.⁴⁹

Washington City Paper
April 1999



⁴⁹ Laura Lang, "Dream City," *Washington City Paper* (16-22 April 1999), p. 30.

Re-Imaging the Housing of Last Resort

Coinciding with the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe, most large-scale construction of public housing ceased by the early 70's. Like Pruitt-Igoe, however, the projects that had already been built had begun to show serious signs of decay. Although little was done in the way of creating more public housing in the wake of this decay – or even maintain the housing that had already been built – much was being done to forever stigmatize public housing as “the projects.” It was the lack of any substantial action during the decades since the early 70's that arguably contributed to the negative image still attached to public housing to this day. Briefly stated, the few legislative acts that did get passed, instead of improving the situation, only made matters worse. Civil rights legislation passed during the 60's prohibited discrimination and opened up public housing developments to minorities and welfare recipients. New regulations passed in the 80's gave preference to extremely low-income households. Thus the concentration of extremely poor and minority tenants in public housing accelerated during the '60's, '70's and '80's, and public housing came to be viewed as the housing of last resort. It was also during this period, beginning in the 60's, that public housing began to shift its focus toward the elderly. One critic suggests that the reason for this shift was because public housing for the elderly “taps the only remaining reservoir of poor people who are also white, orderly and middle-class in behavior. Neighborhoods that will not tolerate a ten-story tower packed with Negro mothers on AFDC might tolerate a tower of sweet but impoverished old folks.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Wright, 239. Quote of Lawrence Friedman.

By now, most large urban public housing projects were targets for criticism and negative press, not just the high-rise housing form. It seemed that the predictions of the private housing industry many years earlier had finally come true; or, at the very least, it seemed that the negative image of public housing initially created by them had been fully accepted by the general public. The image of public housing became associated not only with the failure of modern architecture and of the housing program itself, but also with much larger societal phenomena and problems such as continued racial segregation, the “ghettoization” of the inner city and, more generally, the outright failure of the United States Government. As discussed in chapter one, during the 80’s and 90’s there were many forms of media available to create, perpetuate, and in effect normalize the negative image of public housing. From newspapers and books to television and film, many images of public housing were provided to an audience that would most likely never have encountered a project firsthand for themselves. The project eventually came to symbolize everything that was wrong with the American city.

In a report by the National Commission on Urban Problems, public housing was branded as “anti-community” and, as with earlier critiques, the responsibility was placed on the architects who had advocated high-rise towers. According to the report, “Perhaps the theories of such architects and city planners as Corbusier also had a share in this influence on height.”⁵¹ Once again, critics placed the bulk of the blame on the architecture of public housing, avoiding the more political and difficult issues of management and accountability on the part of PHAs and HUD. Henceforth, images of

⁵¹ Ibid.

the destruction of public housing would be used over and over again to signify real progress in the reform of the program. (Fig. 4.1)

Eventually, as the images of failure perpetuated by the press and other media had so deeply penetrated the mainstream consciousness, any further investment in the housing program was deemed preposterous. Despite the obvious need for housing assistance to serve additional families, Congress provided no additional funding from the fiscal years 1994 to 1999. The House of Representatives proposed legislation to repeal the 1937 Public Housing Act and start afresh with a new program. Several members of Congress even called for the complete elimination of HUD. To quote one of HUD's brochures, "There was no question that a dramatic turnaround was needed. Such a turnaround would have to be fundamental, multifaceted and able to attract broad support."⁵² The HOPE VI program would turn out to be exactly the program HUD was looking for and one that would allow for the kind of dramatic transformation needed in order to once again put a positive spin on the public housing program.

Legislating Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere

The HOPE VI program was born out of recommendations made in a report by the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing in 1992. The report found that approximately 100,000 out of 1.3 million public housing units were severely distressed and in need of immediate attention. According to HUD, "although a small percentage of the entire public housing stock, the sheer size and stark images of places



Fig. 4.1 Image of the demolition of high-rise public housing in *A Vision for Change: The Story of HUD's Transformation*.

like Cabrini Green gave them disproportionate importance.”⁵³ In order to “eradicate” failed public housing projects, the Commission recommended revitalization in three general areas: physical improvements, management improvements, and social and community services. Given the nature of image making, this study will look primarily at the physical improvements that have resulted from the program because they are the most visible in both actual terms and in how the program is perceived and marketed. Also, the majority of funding provided through HOPE VI is used for physical improvements, whereas a much smaller proportion is required and actually used for the provision of social services. It is important to note however that, as with earlier programs, HOPE VI is explicit in it not being merely a “bricks-and-mortar” program. At the April 1995 demolition of Raymond Rosen Apartments in Philadelphia, then Secretary Henry Cisneros said, “Today is not about the destruction of towers; it’s about the building of dreams for people.”⁵⁴ However, as we will see with re-imaging of many public housing projects, it is precisely about the destruction of towers.

HOPE VI was also originally known as an “Urban Revitalization Demonstration,” intended not only to improve the most severely distressed public housing but also to be a catalyst for overall neighborhood reinvestment and revitalization. As a “demonstration” program, the experimental nature of the investment was made more explicit. When the program first began, investment on the part of the federal government was much more extensive, while conversely, the neighborhood

⁵² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *A Promise Being Fulfilled: The Transformation of America’s Public Housing* (July, 2000), p. 1.

⁵³ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Public Housing That Works: The Transformation of America’s Public Housing* (May 1996), p. 3.

transformation expectations were much more timid. Initially, HOPE VI grants of up to \$50 million were made available for the redevelopment of up to 500 units of severely distressed public housing. Originally, the HOPE VI program was essentially an extension of the earlier HUD Comprehensive Modernization program, which sought to rehabilitate the existing public housing stock rather than resort immediately to demolition. For the first few years of the program, demolition of the existing housing stock was more piecemeal and only the most severely distressed high-rise housing was demolished.

Scaling back the amount of public expenditure, beginning in mid-1994 HUD promoted its amended version of the same program and called it “HOPE VI Plus.” This new version encouraged housing authorities to leverage the HOPE VI grant with other public grants and private investment opportunities to develop even larger mixed-income neighborhoods. By leveraging the HUD money, the program sought to simultaneously minimize HUD’s contribution and make the projects more sustainable in the long term. HUD also allowed grantees to build new housing both on-site and in surrounding neighborhoods, even if those neighborhoods already had large concentrations of low-income minority households. Finally, in 1995, HUD stopped requiring housing authorities to provide one-for-one replacement for lost public housing units, which gave PHAs much more flexibility in their plans for redevelopment.

In 1998, Congress passed the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act, also known as the Public Housing Reform Act. That Act reflected a developing consensus that public housing could be reformed along the lines that HUD had suggested: by

demolishing and replacing the worst public housing, reducing crime, supporting increased resident self-sufficiency and taking stronger measures to upgrade HUD and PHA management. In addition, the Act essentially sought to extend the program's objective to house working and upwardly mobile families through the deconcentration of poverty. Under the Act, each housing authority was required to provide an "Admissions Plan for Deconcentration," which required each PHA to adopt a plan to place relatively higher-income families in lower-income developments and lower-income families in higher-income developments. In addition, each PHA was required to affirmatively advance fair housing in its program. Finally, representing the government's continued preference for downsizing and making public agencies more accountable for their actions, the Act set another goal of raising the overall performance standards for PHAs. For example, if a PHA was determined to be troubled according to a set inventory of performance criteria, HUD was henceforth required to seek receivership (i.e., federal administrative authority over local agencies) within two years if significant improvements were not made. Importantly, one of these performance criteria was the physical condition of a PHA's housing. At the same time HUD sought to punish the worst performers, it also planned to reward the best performers according to a new Capital Fund formula, which contained an incentive for excellent performance.

HUD again sought greater partnerships between public and private entities by encouraging more ambitious mixed-financed projects, combining public and private funds to develop mixed-income communities in which public housing units would be part of projects with other affordable and market-rate units. Finally, mandatory conversion required PHAs to tear down what were determined to be the most unlivable

and expensive projects and instead provide tenant-based vouchers. Since 1993, HOPE VI has awarded more than \$4 billion in grants for the revitalization of 149 public housing developments in 90 different cities, and has demolished tens of thousands of units of public housing.⁵⁵

Marketing the Transformation

As when public housing was first built, the transformation of public housing under the HOPE VI program is heavily marketed. Even more so now, it seems, marketing is seen as a critical component of public housing transformation, since the transformation has to overcome the stigma that public housing now has that was not as commonly accepted when public housing was first built. Regrettably, since individual housing authorities are no longer required to submit annual reports on their actions to the federal government, the literature available for investigation is limited to the more “macro”-oriented reports produced by HUD. Absent of the kind of local-level detail one finds in the earlier city housing authority reports, the HUD reports are no less revealing in their overall message and in their promotion of the latest iteration of the public housing program.

HUD’s marketing materials began to use the word “transformation” in 1996, only a few years after the HOPE VI program had officially begun. The first report titled *Public Housing That Works: The Transformation of America’s Public Housing* reflected the limited capability of the program to realize the kind of transformation HUD originally

⁵⁵ Housing Research Organization website: www.housingresearch.org

envisioned and deemed necessary to overcome the program's stigma. Although lacking in visual material, the report does not want for expression of the program's view of public housing as a mere pause in the road to homeownership. In the introductory letter, former President Bill Clinton expresses hope that, "public housing can once again be thought of as a safe and decent place for families who need a little help as they pursue – and achieve – the American dream." Implied in the statement is the belief that public housing exists somewhere *before* achieving the American dream. Also in the report is the belief that the only way to transform the projects is to return the program to its more punitive roots: "Impose tough expectations that hold public housing residents responsible for their actions...residence in public housing is a privilege that imposes on tenants some reciprocal obligations...to respect the rule of law."⁵⁶

A few years later, in December of 1999, HUD released *HOPE VI: Building Communities, Transforming Lives*. By this time, the earlier restrictions such as the one-for-one replacement requirement had been relaxed and enough projects were built to begin telling the story of HUD's "successful transformation." The cover image of the Orchard Gardens project in Boston illustrates the kind of public housing that HUD imagines existing – or at least wants the reader to imagine existing – in the new HOPE VI developments. (Fig. 4.2) The image captures what appears to be an exchange between different members of the same community, all occurring around the front porch. The front porch, long a favorite among the New Urbanists, is now viewed as having the same potential for fostering communal exchanges among residents of public housing. Minus the community's implied racial diversity and the nostalgia for an

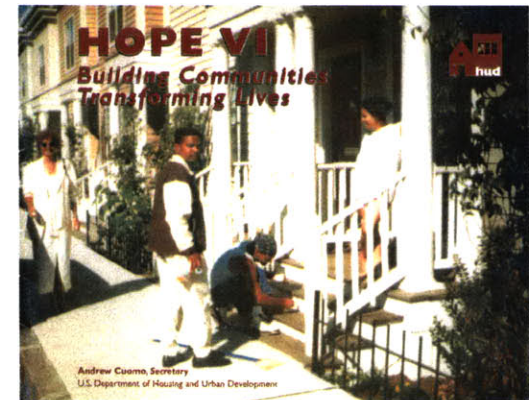


Fig. 4.2 Community exchange at Boston's Orchard Gardens.

⁵⁶ HUD (May, 1996), p. 3.

architectural past, the image is reminiscent of some of the earlier images of public housing. Like the earlier images, the tenants are photographed in a way that is meant to illustrate how they take pride in their environment and the initiative to fix it up. In this image, presumably two of the project's tenants appear to be repairing the front steps of a neighbor's house.

Inside the report, an introductory letter from then HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo begins the story of the HOPE VI transformation:

Sixty years ago, when Techwood Homes in Atlanta was built, it defined the initial concept for public housing: Demolish slums and build modest housing for low-income people. Today Techwood, rebuilt as Centennial Place, offers a model for building sustainable communities in the 21st century.⁵⁷

Whether or not Secretary Cuomo understands exactly how similar the approach under HOPE VI is to the approach taken when Techwood was first built, is uncertain. Paradoxically, he condemns the earlier projects ("We should not have been surprised when these projects failed.") but then goes on to suggest that we repeat the same model as before: "HOPE VI offers a bold and comprehensive solution: Rather than reinvest in failure, build new communities. Start from the ground up." Again, the solution for transforming a slum is to first demolish the existing neighborhood and start over. The model of demolition and starting over may be the same, but Cuomo is confident that what is built now is not only different but also better than what was built before: "This time we listened and are doing it right." Few would question that what is

⁵⁷ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *HOPE VI: Building Communities, Transforming Lives* (Dec. 1999), p. 3.

being built in place of the earlier projects is dramatically different. As with the earlier public housing, there are almost no similarities between the architecture and urban design of the old neighborhood and that of the new project, but again, the initial approach to the redesign is the same. This is illustrated by Cuomo's answer for how to "do it right": "Begin with the basic concept that this is not about building housing, but about building communities."⁵⁸ One of the problems with the earlier housing projects and what led them to be easily identifiable as public housing was that they were also designed as entire communities: all at once, from the ground up and from the same architectural hand.

The report's introduction sets up the need for transformation and re-imaging: "Large high-rise and barracks-style projects, collapsing under the burdens of poor design, deferred maintenance, and decades of hard use, have unjustly defined the public image of public housing."⁵⁹ In looking at the transformation of public housing, the physical change is almost always featured first, since the physical change is the most immediate and the most visible. Under the heading "Attractive Places to Live," before-and-after images are presented to illustrate the dramatic changes possible through the HOPE VI program. One series of images shows the transformation of Boston's Orchard Park into the Orchard



Fig. 4.3 Boston's Orchard Park is transformed into the Orchard Gardens Estates. The caption for the series reads: "barren "project" made beautiful.

⁵⁸ Ibid.
⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.

Gardens Estates, or as the caption reads “Barren ‘project’ made beautiful.”⁶⁰ (Fig. 4.3) With the Orchard Park series, a middle photo shows a portion of the project transformed in the early modernization phase. Moving chronologically along the continuum of transformation, one is led to the conclusion that the final image of the Estates is the most “beautiful,” since it represents the most dramatic change from the existing condition and comes closer to the culturally and ideologically preferable form of the single-family house. In addition to Orchard Park, the report features images of the new Townhomes on Capitol Hill in Washington DC and the Village of West Haven in Chicago. For West Haven, formerly Henry Horner Homes, the caption reads “From high-rise to human scale.”⁶¹ (Fig. 4.4)

In addition to the HUD report, in the same year a ten-minute video was produced to further highlight the transformation of public housing under HOPE VI and the leadership of Secretary Cuomo. The video begins with an image of high-rise housing fading to an image of a single-family house with the narrator saying, “In place of dilapidated high-rises, people are coming home.” The video describes the HOPE VI developments as “new communities for the year 2000,” but there is nothing new about the imagery being used. On the contrary, with the help of the Congress for the New Urbanism, the images of the new communities are very familiar. The examples given are of low-rise, often detached homes, much like the images that were used to represent the slums when public housing was first built. The language is exceedingly dramatic: HUD is “transforming neighborhoods, changing lives and revitalizing our cities” as well as providing a “radical solution to the problem” of public housing.



Fig. 4.4 View of Chicago's Henry Horner Homes and Village of West Haven.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

The statistics are no less dramatic. According to the video, as of 2000 HUD had approved the demolition of 96,000 public housing units, had built 129 HOPE VI communities and had so far allotted 3.6 billion dollars to transform public housing. By 2002, HUD will have demolished 100,000 of the nation's worst public housing. Following the last statistic, video images of public housing implosions are offered up for the viewer to ponder. The narration continues: "What HOPE VI is building in its place is truly remarkable." Public housing is being "rebuilt with people in mind," as the architects are "replacing high-rises with townhomes." According to a public housing resident, "You look at these and you don't think they're public housing because they are homes." Finally, a short interview with Elinor Bacon, Deputy Assistant Secretary For Public Housing Investments and administrator of the HOPE VI program, informs the viewer that the program is a "tremendous success," but does not reveal how exactly its success is measured.

A more recent report, *A Promise Being Fulfilled: The Transformation of America's Public Housing* (2000), offers even more startling images of public housing transformation. The first image on the cover represents a new look for public housing: 2½ -story row houses with front porches, but again, the image is not new (Fig. 4.5) An enclosed letter from the former Secretary Cuomo begins, "I am very pleased to present you a copy of our new report to the President..." The tone of the report is immediately positive and upbeat, preparing the reader for a story of success with no room for failure. In the letter, HUD's accomplishments are clearly spelled out. According to Cuomo, we

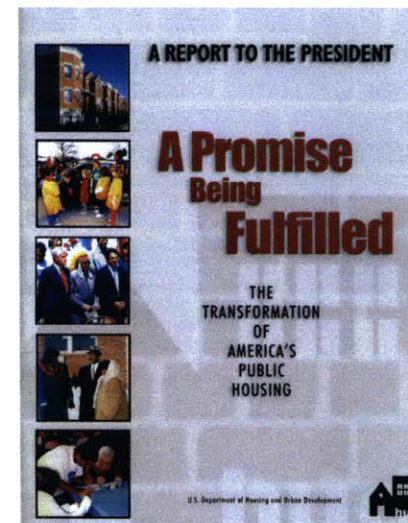


Fig. 4.5 The cover of HUD's Report to the President, 2000.

⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

have: “reinvented HUD...; replaced the worst public housing projects with mixed-income scattered site or townhouse communities...; turned around the worst performing housing authorities...;” and “made low-income communities safer.” Finally, he concludes the letter with, “Today, these actions are transforming the public housing system from a symbol of despair to one of hope. This is the goal you set for us, and we can say with pride that we are achieving it.” Followed by the letter from the Secretary to the President is another letter, this one from the Assistant Secretary Harold Lucas to Secretary Cuomo. Once again, in an upbeat tone, the letter further justifies and praises the most recent actions of HUD: “The progress we have made under your leadership is clearly documented in our new report.” He concludes, “Thank you again for the enormous opportunity to assist you and our communities in this critical and exciting transformation.”⁶²

The first chapter of the report entitled *Transformation*, appropriately enough, talks about not only transforming the physical stock of public housing but also the entire public housing system: “This report tells a remarkable story: how the public housing system, unjustly but widely considered a colossal failure several years ago, is being turned around.”⁶³ According to Secretary Cuomo, “When the Federal Government embarked on a large-scale effort to provide clean and decent housing for low-income Americans 50 years ago, we did not imagine how that dream would turn into what is too often a nightmare.”⁶⁴ Topping the list for transforming the system are first transforming HUD, and second transforming the public housing stock. However, in order to show

⁶² HUD (July, 2000), p. 1.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

immediate results, transforming the public housing stock is viewed as a priority. Leading off the chapter on transforming public housing stock are what HUD sees as “The Problems: Cabrini Green, Robert Taylor Homes, Lafayette Courts, Techwood Homes and Desire.”⁶⁵ These, according to HUD, are the projects that have created the negative image of public housing for most Americans: “massive, crime-ridden high-rises and overly dense or barracks-like low-rises.”⁶⁶ On the same page of the report, a quote by former Vice President Al Gore illustrates the Administration’s solution to “the problems”: “To accelerate the *reinvention* of public housing units, we will demolish and replace 100,000 public housing units around the country ... Our *reinvention* benefits the 3 million residents of public housing and taxpayers at the same time.”⁶⁷ In order to “reinvent” public housing as something new, the problems of the past must first be erased.

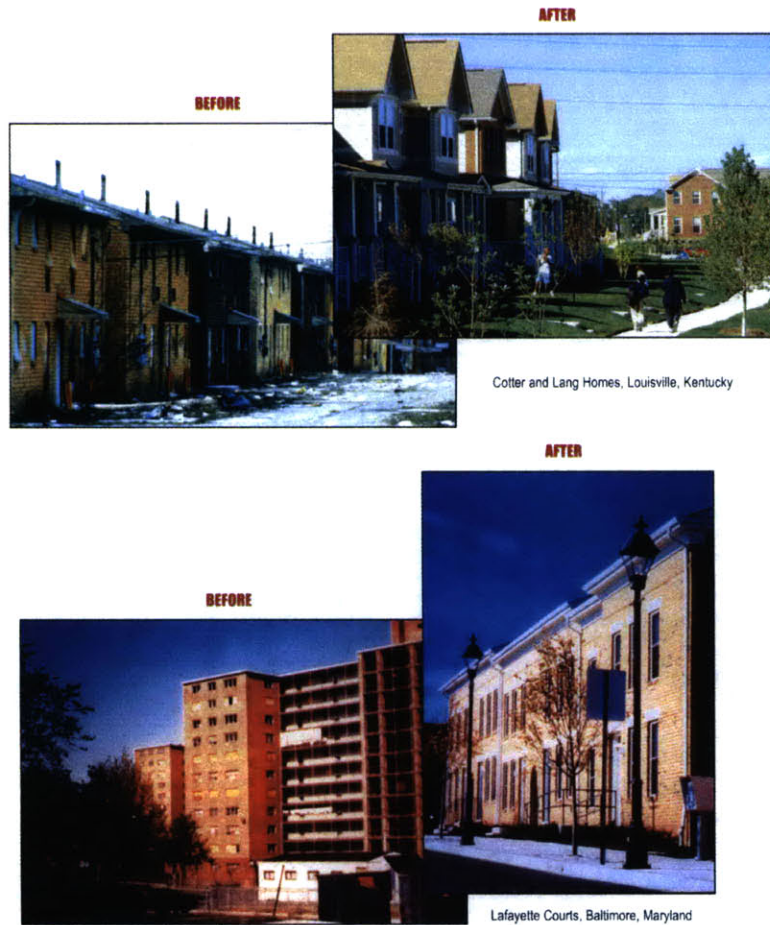
As previously mentioned, the report offers startling before-and-after images of public housing transformation. In fact, fully four pages of the report are devoted exclusively to before-and-after images of HOPE VI projects around the country. Although there are obviously many more that could be featured, the ones selected represent some of the best examples according to HUD. (Figs. 4.6– 4.9) As with the earlier USHA reports, a favorite marketing device is contrasting the absolute worst conditions existing before with the best conditions after. A more accurate architectural comparison might be contrasting the new HOPE VI project with an image of the pre-existing project when it

⁶⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

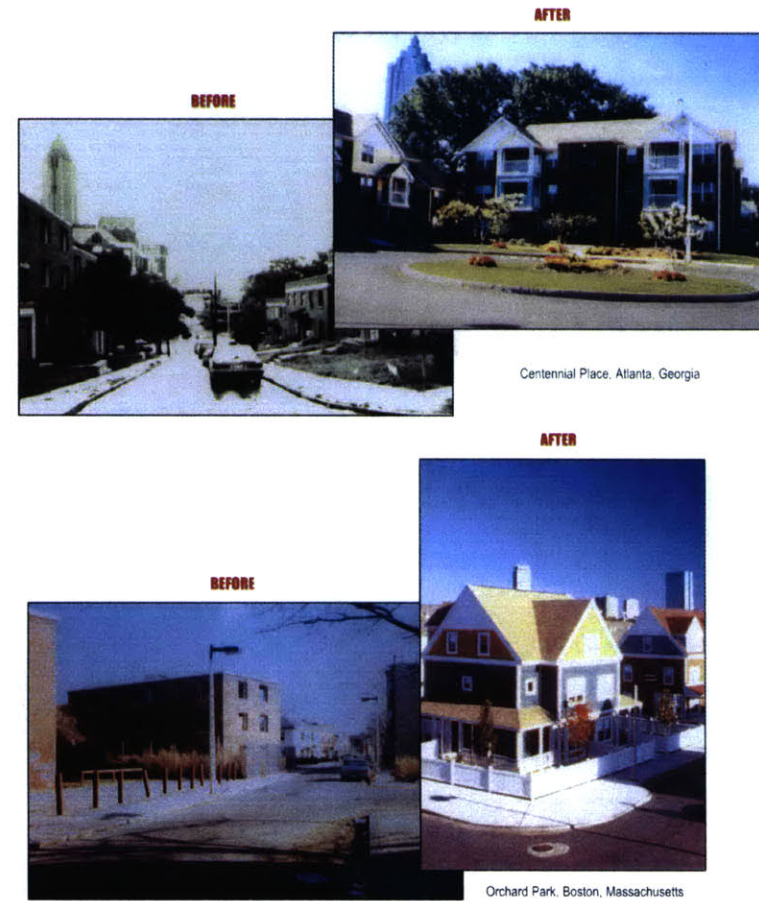
⁶⁷ Ibid. (emphasis added).

Transformation Through HOPE VI



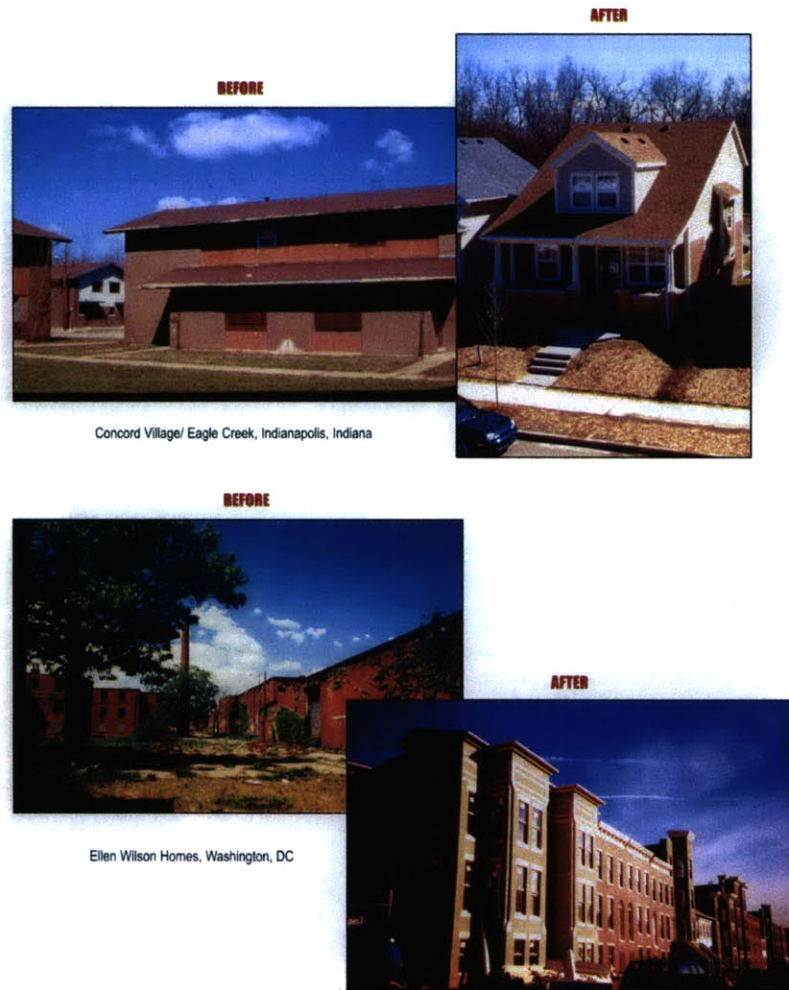
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Fig. 4.6 HUD's examples of physical transformation possible through the HOPE VI program. The transformations generally fall under three types: barracks to row houses, barracks to single-family homes and high-rises to row houses.



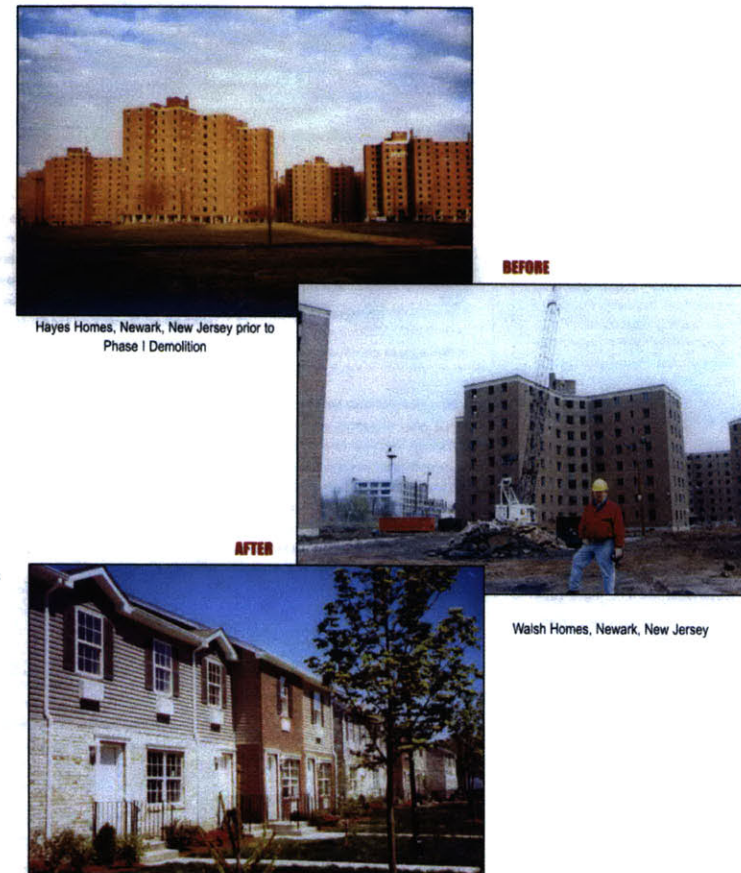
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Fig. 4.7 Barracks to row houses and barracks to single-family homes.



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Fig. 4.8 Barracks to single-family homes and barracks to row houses.



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Fig. 4.9 High-rises to row houses.

was still new, before the many years of mismanagement and lack of maintenance took their toll on the physical structure.

As the images illustrate, there are typically three different types of physical transformations that take place under HOPE VI. The first involves changing what are often described as “barracks-style” housing to row houses (or what *appear* to be row houses). Barracks-style housing consists of the low-rise projects built primarily during the first phase of public housing construction and are referred to throughout HUD’s literature. Over time, as public housing began to show signs of decay, these low-rise projects virtually devoid of architectural detail came to be described as “barracks.” Examples of the barracks to row house transformation are Centennial Place in Atlanta and Ellen Wilson Dwellings in Washington DC. The second type of transformation involves transforming high-rise housing to row houses. This type offers the most dramatic physical transformation and the most visually dramatic contrast for the media. Since Pruitt-Igoe, implosions of high-rise housing continue to be used to symbolize the end of public housing. (Fig. 4.1) Examples of this type of transformation are Lafayette Courts in Baltimore, Walsh Homes in Newark and Cabrini-Green in Chicago. The third type of transformation involves changing the barracks-style housing to detached single-family homes (or what appear to be detached single-family homes). In some ways, this last pattern represents the most radical image transformation, representing as it does the shift between two housing forms that are socioculturally charged, polar opposites: The first embodies all of the negative associations that go along with government subsidized housing for the poor and the latter symbolizes the ultimate American dream

of owning one's home. Examples of this type are Cotter and Lang Homes in Louisville, Concord Village in Indianapolis and Orchard Park in Boston.

Another possible transformation, conspicuously missing from the above set of patterns, is changing high-rise housing to detached single-family homes. This transformation type is not typically found, not least of all in the HUD literature. This is likely due to the fact that this shift in housing type represents the greatest reduction in housing densities. Although the shift successfully meets the HOPE VI objective of reducing density, it would likely be far less readily accepted by public housing advocates because of the significant reduction in affordable units. If one were to arrange the housing types according to density, at one extreme would be the high-rise and at the other extreme the detached house, leaving the barracks-style or row house somewhere in the middle. Usually, the transformation involves downgrading to the next-least-dense housing type, which means it is unlikely that one would find the transformation from high-rise to detached housing.

Finally, the last report produced under the leadership of Secretary Cuomo is called *A Vision for Change: The Story of HUD's Transformation*. As the title suggests, the report outlines the transformation of HUD and serves as a culmination of all of the work accomplished during the Clinton/Gore Administration. Although the report's focus is much broader than merely looking at the transformation of the public housing stock, images of public housing's physical transformation are yet again featured prominently and are used as an indicator of the successful transformation of HUD. The first two images of the report show before-and-after images of the Park DuValle project in

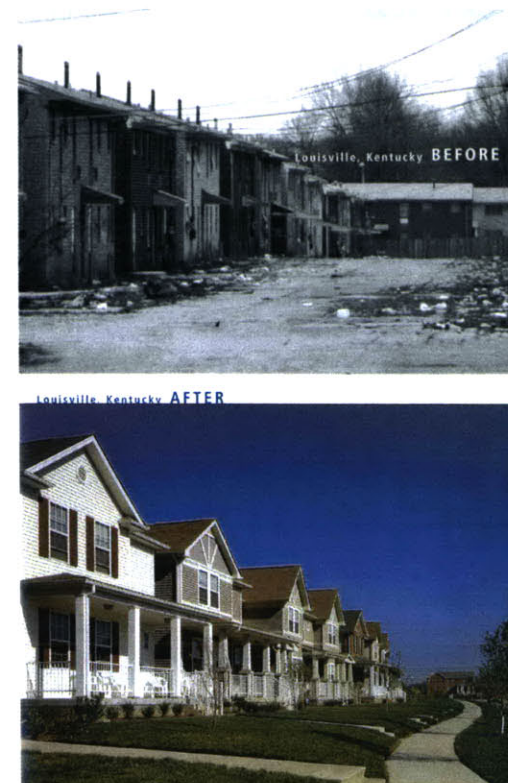


Fig. 4.10 The HOPE VI program is changing the face of Louisville, Kentucky.

Louisville, Kentucky. (Fig. 4.10) The before image shows the erstwhile dilapidated public housing in black and white, whereas the after image shows an image of the new housing in full color. The switch from black and white to color further aids in contrasting the two conditions. Also important to note is how the name of the project is curiously missing from the description: The images are labeled Louisville, KY before and Louisville, KY after. Ostensibly, the transformation possible through HOPE VI is no longer limited to a particular project but, as the images attest, HUD through its HOPE VI program is “changing the face of entire cities.”⁶⁸

Design Objectives: HUD Teams up with the CNU and the AIA

HUD soon realized that it could not transform public housing alone, at least not the kind of physical and symbolic transformation deemed necessary to successfully re-image public housing. The housing authorities would again seek out visionaries who are arguably better equipped to achieve the kind of design and image transformation necessary in order for the program to succeed. This time, through recent partnerships, HUD is looking to both the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) to provide design guidance with HOPE VI developments. In contrast to when public housing was first built, HUD now seeks a more direct partnership with the organization with which it shares a common design ideology. The CNU has consistently demonstrated a very clear bias for traditional neighborhood design, and is a critical partnership for HUD in its mission to redesign public housing to

⁶⁸ HUD (July 2000), p. 2.

look more like the nostalgic images of typical turn-of-the-century neighborhoods it now promotes.

Much of the rhetoric behind the HOPE VI transformations stems from its supposedly greater emphasis on design: “Over the past several years, a new philosophy has emerged within HUD that recognizes the importance of good design in the development of public housing.”⁶⁹ It is precisely statements like this that ignore the fact that it was an overemphasis on design that some critics claim produced the kind of housing that they are so quick to erase. Indeed, it is not necessarily the emphasis on design that has changed, but rather the definition of “good design.” Interestingly, instead of the modern architecture preferred when public housing was first built, the preference is now for the more traditional architecture and urban design promoted by the CNU. Stated slightly differently, architects are looking to the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) instead of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) when designing public housing.

Recently, HUD teamed up with the CNU to create *Principles for Inner City Neighborhood Design: HOPE VI and the New Urbanism*. The manual makes plain both the relationship between the two organizations as well as their shared image for public housing. One needs to look no further than the cover to see that their vision for public housing is dramatically different from the images once promoted. (Fig. 4.11) The scale of development is no more than three stories high. The buildings are arranged to define a continuous street edge along the primary streets with private yards behind. Service

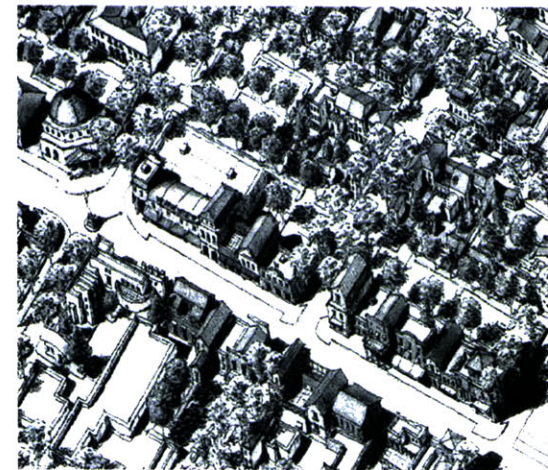


Fig. 4.11 The vision of HOPE VI and the CNU.

alleyways with cottage houses, sheds or rear garages lining either side have the effect of further dividing the blocks. Overall, the scale, character and variety of building types are reminiscent of the neighborhoods cleared during the days of urban renewal. Even the service alleys are like the alleys once so despised by the housing authorities as places of criminal activity and mischief. Recreating the kind of diversity of such a neighborhood is not only difficult to achieve under HOPE VI; in many ways, it is virtually impossible, considering the program's current economic and regulatory restrictions.

As illustrated in the manual's design principles, the design objectives of HOPE VI are noticeably different from the design objectives when public housing was first built. The first principle, citizen and community involvement, represents a significant difference in the level of constituent involvement. Rather than the traditional top-down approach, HOPE VI has the stated intention of engaging public housing residents, community members and local institutions, among others, in the design and development process. Second, economic opportunity linkage clauses serve to benefit the project's immediate neighborhood, in that the projects must earmark much of the contracting work to neighborhood and minority businesses. This principle illustrates how HOPE VI attempts to be more than a "bricks-and-mortar" program by providing local job opportunities. The third principle calls for a diversity of housing types and price levels, thereby creating greater housing opportunities for a greater number of people. Reacting to the rather limited variety of housing typologies of earlier projects, HOPE VI seeks to create communities with a mix of housing types targeted primarily to families. Although all of the principles imply a reactionary approach to the design of earlier public

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Congress for New Urbanism, *Principles for*

housing, the fourth principle is more explicit: “New development should help repair existing neighborhoods or create new ones and should not take the form of an isolated ‘project’.”⁷⁰ Following the development patterns of more traditional neighborhoods, the manual calls for compact, pedestrian-friendly and mixed-use communities. In support of the traditional neighborhood, a fifth principle recommends the creation of mixed-use neighborhoods, a principle that unfortunately has yet to be realized in many of the HOPE VI projects. Public housing built in the past was built according to Euclidian planning principles, which called for the separation of uses.

As earlier projects sought to create more internalized worlds, often isolated from the rest of the city, projects under HOPE VI seek to be better connected through public transportation, open space and streets. Streets are especially important and take on a very different perception under HOPE VI than before. HOPE VI and the New Urbanism promote streets as shared public space and encourage gathering along them – unlike earlier days, when the streets were viewed more as facilitators for the efficient flow of traffic rather than for public gathering. Public open space is once again important, but this time should be given more definition and programmed to foster greater activity. HOPE VI projects attempt to avoid the undefined and often ambiguous open space more common to modern public housing. (Fig. 4.12) Jane Jacobs’ “eyes on the street” and Oscar Newman’s “defensible space” become standard guiding principles for creating safer, more defensible neighborhoods. This is a reaction to the image of public housing as unsafe havens of drug and criminal activity, and therefore in need of surveillance. Another important design principle of the HOPE VI program is that public

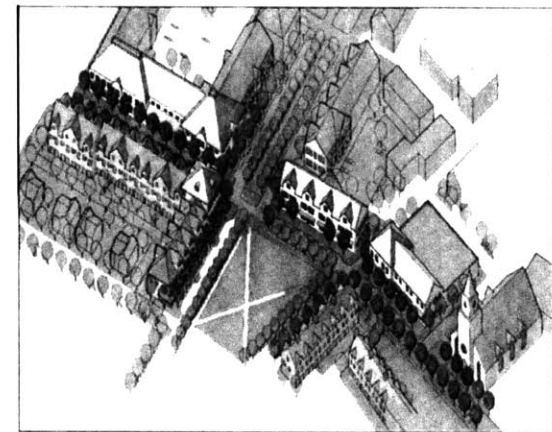


Fig. 4.12 Rendering of public space for Northend Master Plan in Newport, RI, Calthorpe Associates. The architecture defines a hierarchy of public and semi-public spaces.

housing should be indistinguishable from other housing in the neighborhood. According to the manual, “With the help of CNU’s principles, housing authorities across the United States are rebuilding crumbling housing projects as integral parts of their broader community, indistinguishable from private development.”⁷¹ Reflecting a different image of public housing, *indistinguishable* becomes the key word that is used over and over again for the design objectives of HOPE VI. Rather than designing projects to look intentionally different from surrounding neighborhoods – as was the case before – the new housing should blend in with the neighborhood. (Fig. 4.13) Finally, “dwelling as mirror of self” is “the key to self-esteem and community pride.”⁷² Although this final design principle is rather ambiguous, it illustrates well the importance of the home as a symbol of community pride and self-worth and HOPE VI’s ideological shift from communal housing to the private home. (Fig. 4.14)

Although many of the design principles are different now than when public housing was first built, there are some important similarities. As with earlier public housing, HOPE VI is seen as a way of building entire communities *en masse*: “The tools of New Urbanism can help housing agencies and developers build communities, rather than just buildings.”⁷³ This was also the intention of designers of earlier public housing but, due to cost limitations, it was never fully realized. “Build it and the residents will change accordingly” is a message repeatedly used in the HOPE VI design manual. It is again this kind of environmentally deterministic view of public housing that some see as a reason for the failure of the earlier projects. According to the manual, “Neighbors know



Fig. 4.13 This block in the new Townhomes on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC is composed of four different building types with seven different facades.

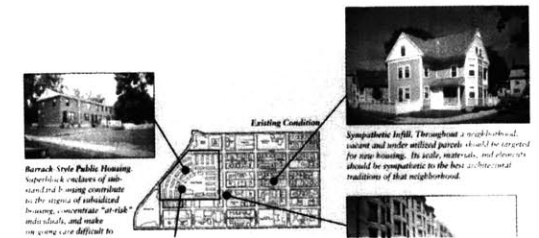


Fig. 4.14 “Barracks-style public housing” on the left is replaced by “sympathetic infill” on the right.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2.

⁷² Ibid., 5.

each other and take a special sense of pride in their homes and community. Healthy neighborhoods foster positive community spirit that can in turn help mend old wounds and remake the city.” Much is being assumed by the manual such as people’s behavior and willingness to interact with one another, that just by living in the same neighborhood one will automatically know everyone else from the same neighborhood. According to Jane Jacobs, “Good shelter is a useful good in itself, as shelter. When we try to justify good shelter instead on the pretentious grounds that it will work social or family miracles we fool ourselves.”⁷⁴ Although a critique on modern housing schemes, the same critique holds true for HOPE VI housing.

Regarding the experimental nature of design, one author writes, “New Urbanism is undergoing an extensive inner-city ‘road test’ in many of the 124 HOPE VI communities in cities throughout the nation.”⁷⁵ According to the author, the movement has already proven itself in more suburban locations with projects such as Seaside, Florida, but now it is looking to the inner city as a new testing ground. (Fig. 4.15) Illustrated by the images of already-completed HOPE VI projects, many of the elements of the more suburban New Urbanist projects reappear as essential components of housing in the inner city. As featured in the program’s marketing materials, the front porch is important because it is believed to facilitate community. (Fig. 4.16) One author terms this the “front porch strategy,” and describes it as a return to the “front porch days” when there was a greater sense of community cooperation. Although a strategy to provide semi-public places for neighbors to meet has the potential to foster community, a reliance on



Fig. 4.15 Private homes at Seaside, Florida.



Fig. 4.16 HUD’s front porch strategy.

⁷³ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁴ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 113.

such a strategy ignores the complexities that exist in a real neighborhood. Furthermore, one wonders if this kind of community exchange – the kind that rarely exists anywhere, arguably – will occur in a community that is created almost overnight and is comprised of an extremely diverse population racially and socioeconomically, unlike that existing at Seaside.

In addition to the HOPE VI design manual, HUD offers additional design training through its regional design training sessions held periodically for PHA employees. From November 16-17, the training took place in Boston, with representatives of the three sponsoring organizations: Elinor Bacon, the Administrator of the HOPE VI program for HUD; Stephanie Bothwell, Director of the AIA's Center for Livable Communities; and Jim Moore, Director of Advisory Services for the CNU. The two-day seminar began with opening comments and a welcoming to Boston by Sandra B. Henriquez: "this is a time for significant transformation and we see it in the before-and-after photos." Following Henriquez, the three sponsors officially welcomed everyone and gave an overview of the training. Stephanie Bothwell reiterated the importance of design for the HOPE VI program and for overcoming the stigma of public housing. She said, "Design can create a new image." The excitement and optimism for the program and for HUD's renewed interest in design were palpable.

From the very first training session, the HOPE VI program and the design principles put forth by the CNU were not questioned. Rather, the questions centered most commonly around issues of "how can it be done in my city?" and "what do I have to do to get a

⁷⁵ Charles Bohl, "New Urbanism and the City: Potential Applications and Implications for Distressed Inner-

HOPE VI grant?”. A number of HOPE VI projects were presented, including some of the AIA-honored projects by John Torti of Torti Gallas and Partners. Torti began by addressing some of the concerns the program has received with respect to the reduction of overall density. He said, “I know there is a general concern about density. Densities are going to be at least half because of added amenities, yards, public spaces, etc.” Regarding apartment buildings, he simply said, “we don’t like to put children over children.” One needs only look at the Sample Building Standards provided in the Design Training folder to get a sense of the scale and type of development preferred. (Fig. 4.17) According to the title page, the *Town of Windsor Design Standards* has been “lightly edited for more urban settings.” The front image is of a picturesque rural landscape and is quite far, both in geographic as well as symbolic terms, from the “urban settings” of most public housing.

In the afternoon, Louise Elving and Willie Jones from The Community Builders, a Boston-based private community development firm, presented a talk titled *Impact of Marketing and Finance on Design of HOPE VI Communities*. According to Elving and Jones, one of the biggest marketing challenges is turning around negative perceptions of the project and neighborhood. They stressed that one not only has to re-market the housing but the neighborhood as well. They went even further in cautioning that there is an extensive amount of expensive marketing required in turning a neighborhood around. After their presentation, when asked if it was necessary to demolish the existing buildings in order to change perceptions, their answer was unanimously yes.

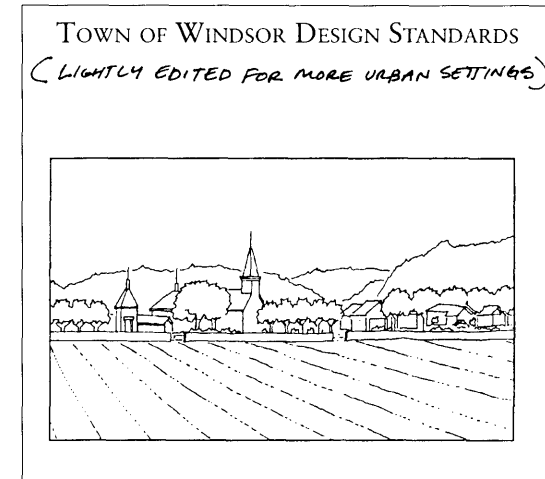


Fig. 4.17 The CNU ideal village of Windsor is “lightly edited” for public housing.

By and large, the training session was well received. Many of the PHA participants agreed with the design principles behind HOPE VI and were anxious to apply many of the principles in their cities. An interesting exception was the Director of the New York City Housing Authority, Sharon Litwin Ebert. Responding to the overwhelming belief by both HUD and the CNU that high-rise housing is bad for families, she questioned this as an overriding objective. She thought the objectives were great for smaller towns and cities but completely unrealistic for most larger city settings, and certainly unrealistic for public housing in her city. When asked what she plans to do with her HOPE VI money, she said, "That's the million-dollar question. I can't tear down the high-rise housing because the demand is too high and I have nowhere to relocate tenants during the redevelopment period. Besides, cute little houses like those at Orchard Park would look ridiculous in New York."

HUD is not only encouraging certain design principles through its literature and its regional design training seminars. Rather, it is also basing the program's funding on what it sees as "good design." "Rather than just sending money to fix the projects, HUD is making it clear: The projects that receive HOPE VI funding should embrace good design principles."⁷⁶ More generally, the objectives of the program are stated on the first page of the HOPE VI Application Kit: "the purpose of HOPE VI Revitalization grants is to assist PHA's to:

1. Improve the living environment for public housing residents of severely distressed public housing projects through the demolition, rehabilitation, reconfiguration or replacement of obsolete public housing projects (or portions thereof);

⁷⁶ HUD, Principles (2000), p. 2.

2. Revitalize sites (including remaining public housing dwelling units) on which such public housing projects are located and contribute to the improvement of the surrounding neighborhood;
3. Provide housing that will avoid or decrease the concentration of very low-income families; and
4. Build sustainable communities.⁷⁷

Relating more specifically to design, a project's need for revitalization is one of the factors used to rate and rank HOPE VI Revitalization applications. One of the factors considered for overall need is whether or not there are major design deficiencies, including "inappropriately high population density, room, and/or unit size and configurations; isolation; and indefensible space."⁷⁸ The maximum number of points an application can get for this criterion is seven, indicating a strong need for revitalization. Although this might not seem like a lot at first, every point counts, especially since preference is given to applications with at least 80 points. Another factor that is rated is the overall quality of the plan. This criterion is worth a total of five points. For the quality of the plan, an application receives the points if it demonstrates excellence in a number of different elements including, at the top of the list, design and planning. The design itself accounts for three points and is followed by the reminder, "HUD is seeking excellence in design."⁷⁹ To further clarify "good design," the application reads:

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *HOPE VI 2001 Revitalization and Demolition Notice of Funds Available (NOFA)*, p. 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

Your proposed site plan, new units, and other buildings must be designed to be compatible with and enrich the surrounding neighborhood and promote mixed-income, mixed-use communities. Local architecture and design elements and amenities should be incorporated into the new or rehabilitated homes so that the revitalized sites and structures will blend into the broader community and appeal to the market segments for which they are intended.⁸⁰

Although somewhat vague in their definition of “excellence in design,” the preference for a contextual scheme and an almost invisible presence for public housing is more explicit.

Finally, in reacting to what is perceived to be the inappropriateness of high-rise buildings for families, HUD has enacted a bylaw prohibiting the typology in future projects. Although the exact reasons for enacting the bylaw are not given, it stands to reason that the law is a reaction to the perceived failure of earlier projects and the negative associations of high-rise public housing. At the Design Training in Boston, David Dixon of Goody Clancy & Associates presented a recent HOPE VI project his firm had been working on in Cleveland. The project was unusual in that it was able to provide the same number of subsidized units as that existing in the high-rise public housing before, while still achieving a mixed-income neighborhood. The project was able to do this because it included a mid-rise and high-rise building for family housing along with a mix of loft and row house units; modeled after Boston’s Tent City. (Fig. 4.18) According to Dixon, the site, which was in an urban setting with magnificent views of the city’s skyline, was a prime location for higher-density forms of housing. After his presentation, one member of the audience commented that, although she liked the scheme, she had heard that they were not supposed to use elevator buildings for public



Fig. 4.18 Design for Riverview HOPE VI project in Cleveland, Goody Clancy & Associates.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

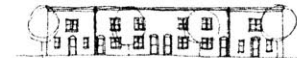
housing. Roma Campanile, who is an Architect Specialist for HUD, replied to the question by saying that what she heard was correct and that HUD generally discourages the use of elevator buildings for family housing, regardless of the location: “We don’t feel it’s an appropriate housing typology for families.” What she failed to mention was that they not only discourage elevator buildings; they have also outlawed them in all HOPE VI dwellings.

5

Ellen Wilson Dwellings to the Townhomes on Capitol Hill

Before it was a slum called Ellen Wilson – a symbol of America's failed public housing policy just six blocks southeast of the Capitol – the site was a slum known as Navy Place that was symbolic of a different failed housing policy.⁸¹

The Washington Post
April 1996



⁸¹ Vernon Loeb, "Public Housing Concept Hinges on the Right Mix," *The Washington Post* (April 25 1996), p. D.C.1.

In the Shadow of the Capitol

In 1994, David Gilmore was presented with an extremely daunting task. Appointed as the receiver of the DC Housing Authority, he was not only charged with the task of turning around one of the most ill-reputed housing authorities in the nation, but also with transforming some of the nation's worst public housing just a stone's throw from the Capitol. Two thousand units, or 20% of the city's public housing, had been so poorly maintained that it was considered uninhabitable. At the time, HUD rated housing authorities across the country according to such indicators as vacancy rates and percentage of rent collected. A perfect score was 100, and a passing grade was 60. The DC Housing Authority earned a mere score of 22.38, making it one of the lowest-ranking authorities in the country.⁸² Worst of all, since many of the city's failed housing projects were clustered within only a few block radius of the Capitol, the housing authority and its activities were an easy symbolic target for media criticism.

As will be illustrated through a closer look at one of the authority's projects, the Ellen Wilson Dwellings, it is precisely the close proximity between the project site and the Capitol that continues to make it a prime target for housing experimentation and image transformation. Through a combination of marketing and design, the former "slum" neighborhood bounded by 6th and 7th and G and I Streets is first imaged as Ellen Wilson Dwellings and, more recently, re-imaged as the Townhomes on Capitol Hill.

⁸² Vernon Loeb, "Mission Accomplished," *The Washington Post* (July 30, 2000), p. B 1.

Alley Dwellings: The Old Urbanism

Prior to the establishment of the USHA and subsequent city housing authorities, Washington, DC had already created its own version and named it according to the city's unique housing problem: the Alley Dwelling Authority (ADA). As a consequence of L'Enfant's original plan for the city, wide deep lots were created and fairly intricate systems of interior alleyways for many of the city's blocks. This configuration made it possible for either carriage houses or servant's quarters to be built at the rear of many of the city's plots. Over time, vacated servant's quarters and makeshift dwellings built along the alleyways served to house a large proportion of the city's poorer immigrants who arrived during the Civil War. Many of these dwellings did not have their own toilets or running water. In 1934, there were estimated to be approximately 200 inhabited alleys.⁸³ The U.S. Congress enacted legislation on June 12, 1934, commonly known as the Alley Dwelling Act, to empower the ADA to "reclaim slums and to provide dwellings for persons of lower incomes."

Attached to the end of the ADA 1939 Annual Report is the Appendix "General Instructions to Architects." This Appendix will serve to illustrate how, at the beginning of the District's public housing program, the design objectives were not as radical as they would later become, and how many are essentially the same as the objectives under the more recent HOPE VI program. Early designs were not seen as the isolated projects that one now associates with public housing. The authority asserts that "its projects are to be part of the city, not self-contained units designed merely to provide for

their own tenants, not mere oases in an urban desert.” Each project “should harmonize with its neighborhood” and “benefit the community as a whole.” The instructions ask that a particular design not result in the “endless repetition of an Authority project over a large area.” An objective that would change following the 1949 Housing Act but would reappear under the HOPE VI program: Projects “should not be more dense than would be beneficial to the community,” and “in a reclaimed slum area this may mean a decrease in present population density.” However, one objective that is rarely mentioned under HOPE VI, if at all, has to do with the long-term costs of a project. The 1939 instructions are rather explicit regarding costs and the avoidance of “shoddy construction” by maintaining that “the cost of a house is its cost during its lifetime, not merely its cost to the time of physical completion.”⁸⁴ Since early public housing was reacting to the often-makeshift construction found in the “slums,” sturdy construction was seen as an essential component for transforming the neighborhood.

It was not until May 21, 1943, that the ADA was renamed as the National Capital Housing Authority (NCHA), and its objectives were redefined. The authority was no longer limited in its geographical scope to the alley neighborhoods around the Capitol, but was now able to broaden its focus to the entire city and to provide war and low-rent housing in addition to the ADA’s slum reclamation projects. Since the NCHA came into being after the Ellen Wilson Dwellings was already constructed, the efforts of the newly defined authority will not be addressed here. However, it is important to note that what was accomplished in those early years under the guidance of the ADA and then

⁸³ Alley Dwelling Authority, *Report of the Alley Dwelling Authority for the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C., December 15, 1935), p. 1.

eventually under the NCHA would continue to plague the city and its subsequent authorities until today. Even though the earlier objectives called for housing that was an integral part of the larger community, they would later come to symbolize the concentration of poverty and racial segregation indicative of the “projects.”

In addition to the ADA and the NCHA, there was yet another group concerned with the alley dwellings in the District: the Washington Housing Association (WHA). The WHA was established around 1935 as a volunteer organization providing public service by bringing attention to the housing needs of the poor. Although not an official government authority, with its highly visible and respected members such as its Honorary President, Mrs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the private association was influential in ways the housing authority was not, especially in the area of garnering media attention. In the WHA 1938 Annual Report, an amateur photograph contest was held to bring “attention to bad housing conditions in the District.” It was called an “experiment in visual education” and was sponsored by the WHA in cooperation with the city’s public libraries. Awards of \$10 for first selection and \$5 for others selected resulted in a group of fifteen being put on display, “most of them excellent examples of bad housing in the District.” (Fig. 5.1) The contest served as an affordable public relations event and to identify future sites for public intervention.⁸⁵ In the WHA’s quest to inform the public, many other photograph exhibits were given in the same year before approximately 90 different organizations, including civic groups, churches, schools and conventions.



Fig. 5.1 Winning photo of a Washington slum.

⁸⁴ Alley Dwelling Authority, *Report of the Alley Dwelling Authority for the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C., June 30, 1939), p. iii.

The WHA's other attempts to portray and bring attention to what were perceived to be the squalid conditions of the alleys were less creative but compelling nonetheless. In its reports, which were made available to the public, the contrasts between the alley dwellings and modern public housing were made explicit. The following is an excerpt from the 1938 Annual Report:

Hidden communities living a life of their own in the shadow of the houses or office buildings surrounding them, they have presented serious problems of disease, delinquency and crime. Breeding spots or refuge for the diseased or criminal, they contaminate the whole city, because what affects one affects all. Christmas trees in alley squares flash brightly for a moment – then the darkness becomes darker by contrast.⁸⁵

Flipping to the next page, one can view images of the newly planned neighborhood of Langston Terrace built to house 274 “Negro” families. The urban design and architecture of the project is far from the more organic quality of the alley neighborhoods. The highly symmetrical plan, focused around a large open space, brings lots of light, space for recreation and order to what is otherwise deemed to be chaotic and “old-fashioned.” (Fig. 5.2) The following is the description of the project's central arcade:

As a symbol of what this new way of life means to the families fortunate enough to live here, the arcade with its sculpted frieze is most significant. The group of figures at the base represents the rural background of the Southland. The changes taking place in work and educational opportunity are unfolded, bringing at the end a symbol of healthy, happy, useful family living. The only decoration on an otherwise highly abstracted surface signifies the housing's



Fig. 5.2 The following caption was given in the 1938 report: “Langston – on the right – a planned housing neighborhood, is sharply contrasted with the old-fashioned, monotonous row housing on the left which costs more and houses fewer people.”

⁸⁵ Washington Housing Association, *In the Shadow of the Capitol: Annual Report, 1938* (Washington, DC, 1938), 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

intent to transform previously uneducated rural folk into more educated and productive citizens.

(Fig. 5.3) Also important to note is the line “families fortunate enough to live here.” Early public housing was viewed almost as a reward mechanism for good citizens by providing them with safe and sanitary – and modern – housing.⁸⁷

On the covers of the WHA annual reports titled *In the Shadow of the Capitol*, full-page images contrast the “squalid” conditions of the alley dwellings with the white and pristine dome of the Capitol in the background. The cover of the 1941 Report is particularly interesting, showing as it does a group of children playing baseball in one of the alleyways. (Fig. 5.4) The image is meant to portray the alleyway as an inappropriate place for such an activity, but in fact illustrates that a real community did exist despite the views of the outside observer. To bring the point home that these conditions were deplorable, the first page of the report calls for the immediate “Elimination of slums” because “a slum is like a cancer – an abnormal growth that spreads and destroys surrounding areas, and can be cured only by surgical treatment.”⁸⁸ Later in the report, images of four children to a bed and three to a crib are offered under the heading “Over-Crowding is a Capitol Crime.”⁸⁹ (Fig. 5.5) By using a quote taken from the U.S. Department of Agriculture as the caption for the photo, the report compares children to chicks: “Growing chicks need comfortable homes that are dry and roomy with plenty of fresh air and sunlight. It never pays to overcrowd them.”



Fig. 5.3 The Langston arcade building illustrates the highly abstract and modern aesthetic of some early housing projects.

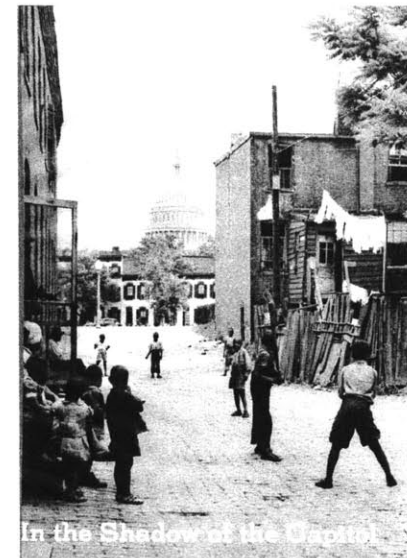


Fig. 5.4 Cover of 1941 WHA report.

⁸⁷ Vale (2000).

⁸⁸ Washington Housing Association, *In the Shadow of the Capitol: Annual Report, 1940-41* (Washington, DC, 1941), p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

As a counterargument to the negative perceptions of the outside observer, James Borchert's *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion and Folk Life in the City, 1850-1970* offers a different perspective, albeit in retrospect. He describes the alley dwelling settlements as coherent and textured communities. He goes on to argue that the negative perception of these neighborhoods was perpetuated primarily out of fear. In one exposé written in 1894 titled *Glimpse at the Night Side of Washington: A Guide to Night Amusements by One Who Has Been There*, the observer writes, "Never go alone into the low Negro alleys at midnight...as you value your life, for there are dens of vice in this beautiful city where murder lurks and where thieves are always on the watch for victims."⁹⁰ Accounts like this one helped to perpetuate the image of the alley dwelling neighborhoods as unsafe and in need of radical reform.

From Navy Place to Ellen Wilson Dwellings

The site before Ellen Wilson Dwellings was known as Navy Place, one of the most notorious alley "slums" in the District. (Figs. 5.6 & 5.7) This area was home to a mix of both middle-class and poor families who wanted to live close to the booming Navy Yard. Hidden in the side streets and alleyways behind the nicer homes, the poor, and usually black, residents lived in makeshift housing known as alley dwellings. (Fig. 5.8) The dwellings often lacked plumbing and were seen by the outside observer as the breeding ground for crime and disease. Navy Place was essentially a self-sufficient



Fig. 5.5 Over-crowding is a Capitol crime.



Fig. 5.6 Ellen Wilson Dwellings location map. Indicated here as NCHA property number 7.

⁹⁰ James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion and Folk Life in the City, 1850-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p. 132. This study of alley dwellings is written retrospectively and from a very different cultural vantage point.

community. As one observer notes, “while individual dwellings decayed, the hidden community presented an appearance of permanence, enhanced by the fact that the alley contained stores which were patronized almost exclusively by the alley residents.”⁹¹

Despite the community’s permanent appearance, media attention would eventually lead to the neighborhood’s disappearance, fueled by a combination of highly publicized visits by high-profile people and the dominant design objectives of the time. The former first lady, Ellen Wilson, showed a particular interest in the Navy Place community. She visited the site for the first time in 1914 and saw only urban pathology when she looked into the dwellings. It is reported that on her deathbed, Wilson requested that legislation be passed to abolish alley dwellings like the ones she saw at Navy Place. This request was enough to send the first flock of slum clearance advocates to the site between 6th and 7th Streets, and in no time, Wilson’s wish was fulfilled. In the late 30’s, the ADA tore down the alley dwellings and dispersed the existing population throughout the rest of the city. With pride, the ADA later recalls how “it was not necessary in any case actually to evict any of the occupants. With the wrecker drawing nearer to their roofs, their neighbors gone, their stores torn down, the last residents of Navy Place finally departed.”⁹² Two images of Navy Place appeared in a 1944 Report of the NCHA, one of which was offered as a representative “sample” of a slum. (Fig. 5.9) Both images



Fig. 5.7 Figure-ground site plan of Navy Place.

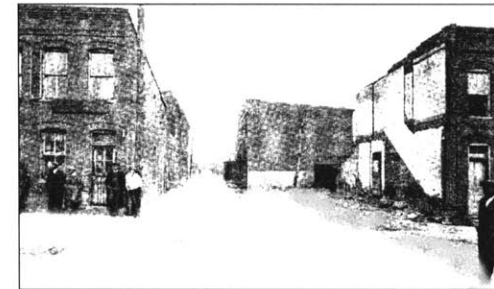


Fig. 5.8 View of Navy Place in 1935.

⁹¹ Alley Dwelling Authority, *Report of the Alley Dwelling Authority for the District of Columbia* (Washington, D.C., June 30, 1940), p. 7.

⁹² *Ibid*, 9.

were used to illustrate the “ineffectiveness of piecemeal slum demolition” and the need for larger-scale slum clearance and redevelopment.⁹³

Although considered large-scale at the time, the proposed plan for Ellen Wilson was actually quite small in comparison to projects built much later under the housing program. The ADA replaced the structures with eighteen two- to three-story buildings for low-income renters, naming them after the former first lady. Even though the new project was promoted as a means to uplift the residents of the alley dwellings, the replacement dwellings were not for everyone who had lived there before. Ellen Wilson Dwellings was built exclusively for whites, which meant that the blacks once living there were no longer welcome. They were either moved into one of the few public housing projects built specifically for blacks, like the Langston community featured in the 1938 report, or they had to find housing on their own.

The new project was designed by Arthur B. Heaton, the same architect for some of the city’s more expensive homes in Cleveland Park. Upon completion, the Ellen Wilson Dwellings was lauded as spacious, garden-style apartments. A 1940 Evening Star article called them “modern, sanitary homes for white families in the lowest income groups.”⁹⁴ The project reflected “the trend to design large garden apartment complexes that deliberately espoused a more open, green environment, unlike the squalid alleys



Fig. 5.9 Representative “sample” of a slum.

⁹³ National Capital Housing Authority, *Report of the National Capital Housing Authority: For the Ten-Year Period 1934-1944* (Washington, DC, 1944), p. 193.

⁹⁴ Lang, 22.

and slums they replaced.”⁹⁵ Images of the site before and after the Ellen Wilson Dwellings were built appeared in the WHA’s 1941 Annual Report. The before image highlights the alley dwellings of Navy Place with the white dome of the Capitol hovering in the distance; as already mentioned, a favorite of the housing authority in illustrating the close proximity between the two. (Fig. 5.10) The after image shows what Ellen Wilson looked like shortly after it opened. (Fig. 5.11) The new buildings are set back from the street to allow for a wide stretch of grass and landscaping. The caption reads: “In place of 70 dilapidated houses and 4 stores, there are now 218 houses and apartments occupied by white families of low income.” The architecture is void of extravagant detail; staggering of brick coursing creates subtle horizontal banding and an implied cornice line.⁹⁶ Illustrating how safe the new project is, the photograph shows a small child sitting peacefully by himself on the front step protected from the dangers of the city outside the confines of the project.

The site plan for the Ellen Wilson Dwellings is absent of anything resembling an alleyway, in essence completely erasing any negative associations the site would have to the previous condition. (Fig. 5.12) According to the caption for a photo of the project in an NCHA 1944 Report, the “only reminder of Navy Place is a sign on a street light.”⁹⁷ (Fig. 5.13) One of the new cross streets was named after the site’s previous neighborhood. The interior of the block, which was the former site for the alley dwellings, has now been opened up and exposed to the block’s perimeter streets. New



Fig. 5.10 Before: Navy Place slums.



Fig. 5.11 After: Ellen Wilson Dwellings.

⁹⁵Ibid, 18. This was according to Tracerics, a firm hired prior to the project’s demolition under HOPE VI to determine if the Ellen Wilson Dwellings had any lasting architectural significance. The firm determined that the ability for the project to convey its important history was essentially destroyed.

⁹⁶This ornamental staggering of brick ironically reappears in the most recent design under HOPE VI.

⁹⁷NCHA (1944), 194.

courtyards created by the symmetrical placement of public housing extend deep into the block's interior. Rather than the tightly packed houses that existed before, the new housing is neatly arranged around clearly defined open space. Referring again to the photo in the NCHA Report, the image illustrates what kind of environment the site plan creates. The dominant element in the photo is the lush landscape of tall trees, grass and ivy covered buildings. The architecture itself is similar in character with the surrounding context of two- to three-story brick row houses. Even the vertical punched windows and brick banding are reminiscent of the "slum samples" that existed on the site before and the neighboring houses spared by the wrecking ball. However, seen in aggregate as a highly repetitive design, the new housing did contrast significantly with other housing in the neighborhood.

About ten years after the project was fully inhabited, the demographics of both the project and the surrounding neighborhood began to change. After a series of Supreme Court decisions prompted District officials to integrate public housing, black families gained access to the project in the 50's. At the same time Ellen Wilson Dwellings was becoming more black, the surrounding neighborhood became more white as middle-class white families moved into the historic old homes and poured money into renovating them. Not surprisingly, given the lack of available funds, maintenance dropped off at the project as it was increasingly populated by African-Americans. In the early 70's, the city demolished five buildings to make room for the Southeast-Southwest Freeway, which ran through one corner of the complex. The highway isolated the project's southern edge, which some argue helped attract crime to the project. Over time, a number of factors combined to create the dismal environment for which Ellen

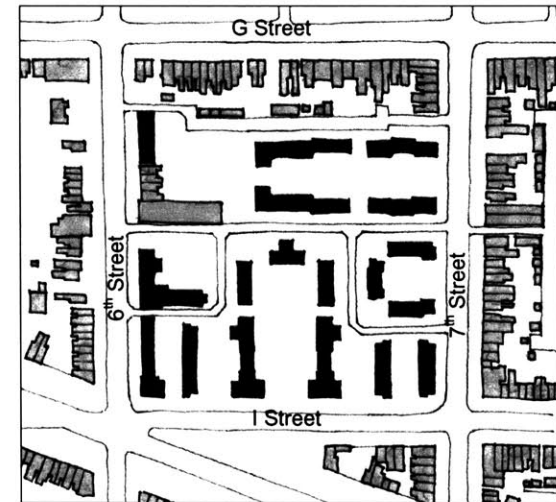


Fig. 5.12 Figure-ground site plan of Ellen Wilson Dwellings.



Fig. 5.13 View of Ellen Wilson Dwellings.

Wilson Dwellings is infamous. Like with the Pruitt-Igoe example, the project's design is ultimately blamed for the failure of the project. Other factors are also to blame but many, including those working for the housing authority, preferred the simplicity of the design argument because it defers much of the blame that could otherwise be placed on them. For example, after the initial investment in building the project, little was done in subsequent decades to maintain the project or improve the overall living conditions for the project's tenants. Eventually, the conditions of the site were perceived to be so bad that, in 1988, the DC Housing Authority (DCHA), the successor of the NCHA, ordered that all of the buildings be evacuated.

Once Ellen Wilson Dwellings was vacated, the site that was once Navy Place yet again became the target of media criticism and a symbol of government failure. A neighbor recalls that, soon after the project was vacated, it looked like "Beirut after the bombings."⁹⁸ (Fig. 5.14) One author writes, "The only lasting improvements since (the project began to decline) have been the cinder blocks sealing up all the first-floor windows and doors, cementing Ellen Wilson's place as a symbol – six blocks from the Capitol – of America's failed public housing policy."⁹⁹ To reinforce the project's negative image in the media, in the fall of 1992 the vacant project was completely taken over by several dozen squatters and local veterans who staged a five-day protest of the government's inaction in providing decent affordable housing. They urged the authorities to turn the buildings over to them for renovation and use. As one neighbor remembers, "we had helicopters flying overhead for 24 hours. It turned into a circus." The protest peaked when Cecil Byrd, executive director of the National Association of

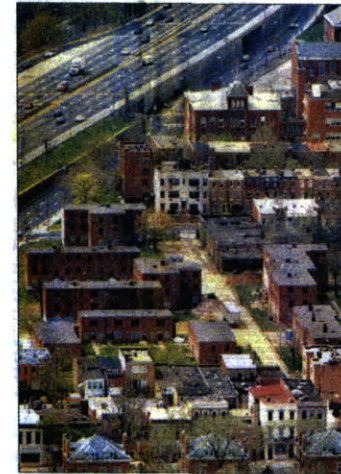


Fig. 5.14 Aerial photograph of Ellen Wilson Dwellings, 1989.



Fig. 5.15 Ellen Wilson's notorious smokestack and protest site.

⁹⁸ Loeb, D.C.1.

Concerned Veterans, stood on top of the project's smokestack for several hours, descending only after the authorities promised to meet with his group. (Fig. 5.15) In a *Post* article, Byrd was quoting as saying "It was beautiful up there...You could see the entire city. But if you look down closer to here, you could see all the trash and all the rats. This is the capital of our nation and something needs to be done."¹⁰⁰ Not long thereafter, something would be done to transform again this site so close to the Capitol.

Re-Imaging Ellen Wilson

Long before the DCHA took any action, roughly a dozen Capitol Hill residents came together in the early 90's to form a partnership called the Ellen Wilson Community Development Corporation (EWCDC). The EWCDC also included local architect Amy Weinstein, Georgetown-based developer Telesis Corp. and Corcoran Jennison of Boston, as a consulting developer to the project. Amy Weinstein joined because of her knowledge of Capitol Hill architecture; Telesis for its expertise in affordable housing development; and Corcoran Jennison for its experience in the country's first-ever transformation of public housing into the mixed-income community of Harbor Point in Boston. The main objective of the group was to do something about the neighborhood's public housing eyesore and symbol of failure. Eventually, after receiving a \$25 million HOPE VI grant they, along with the DCHA's new receiver David Gilmore, set out to erase the failed project from their sight and replace it with the city's first mixed-income housing cooperative. To further erase any reminder of the failed public housing, the project would be renamed as the "Townhomes on Capitol Hill."

⁹⁹ Ibid.

To give some context for the redevelopment and to better understand the image of the project, excerpts from a community newsletter serve to highlight some opinions from the community prior to the project's redevelopment. The newsletter, published once a month, is a collection of articles written by and for residents of the Capitol Hill neighborhood. To encourage an honest exchange among its contributors, the newsletter often changes the authors' names for anonymity. The newsletter features articles by four opponents of the project and two of its staunchest supporters. The project's opponents primarily feel that the mixed-income model would not work because of the stigma of public housing. According to one author:

(The market-rate tenants) can afford to buy fee simple housing in the suburbs, so why would they live in something stigmatized as public housing? No matter what you call it, no matter what it looks like, it will be stigmatized as Ellen Wilson. It is Ellen Wilson and will always be Ellen Wilson.¹⁰¹

Other concerns stem from the fact that many doubted the new public housing tenants would be properly screened. The editor claims that at another Gilmore project, there was no screening process "to prevent criminals and drug sellers/users from becoming tenants." He adds, "I am afraid that low-income black families will be admitted and that they will be unable to resist the pleas of their crack-selling and crack-using relatives and friends. I have seen perfectly decent families succumb to this weakness in the Hill's five projects, and I think it will happen here."¹⁰² Other opponents claim the project is

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Bryce A. Suderow, ed., *Street Stories: The Real Washington D.C.* (August, 1996), p. 21.

¹⁰² Ibid., 4.

the “greatest threat to the Hill’s image and indeed its future” and that the project “will turn inner-Capitol Hill into a ghetto.”¹⁰³

Supporters of the project point out strengths such as Weinstein’s design. One person describes it as “an absolutely superb design.” She goes on to explain that the design “is important not only in terms of its acceptance by the community, but in terms of prospective residents. It will have real curb appeal. People will like it. People will want to live there because it looks very nice.”¹⁰⁴ As with the earlier Ellen Wilson project, there is a general belief by some that the design alone will be enough for the project’s success. An important difference is that now, a much greater emphasis is placed on how the new project must blend in with the neighborhood in a more literal sense than what was intended when Ellen Wilson was designed. According to one proponent, “the only way it will ever be deemed a success, is if it’s indistinguishable” and much like a typical Capitol Hill residential block.¹⁰⁵ Making the project “indistinguishable” and *not* like public housing is stressed over and over again, illustrating how the new objectives for public housing are more *reactive* rather than *proactive* as before.

Despite the criticism from some of the neighbors, Gilmore insisted on acting quickly: “At some point a promise was made to these folks, and at some point we needed to keep it. We couldn’t keep it if we didn’t build it.” Typical for the receiver or the person hired to transform the image of a housing authority, acting quickly and producing highly visible results are seen as crucial. In the spring of 1996, Gilmore and then HUD secretary

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 17.

Henry Cisneros and former Mayor Marion Barry met on-site to mark the beginning of the end for the Ellen Wilson project. Mayor Barry said, “I saw Ellen Wilson full of people. I saw it closed down. I saw the protesters on the roofs. I saw it bricked up. And now I’m going to see the smokestack come down.”¹⁰⁶ A highly publicized event, the city watched as the same smokestack on which Byrd stood in protest a few years back was toppled. For the project’s remaining buildings, Gilmore would later remark with joy, “Man, it’s coming down like match sticks.”¹⁰⁷

Out-Capitol-Hilling Capitol Hill

According to Arthur Jones, the current Director of Public Affairs at the DCHA, “Amy Weinstein has out-Capitol-Hilled Capitol Hill,” with respect to the project’s design. Jones admitted that he could not actually take credit for the phrase; he was just repeating what some of the project’s neighbors have already said. Another employee of the DCHA, when asked how to find the project, said, “Don’t worry. You can’t miss it. It looks like a movie set. It just pops up out of nowhere.” One author, echoing this sentiment, writes, “Freshly painted and lined with bright red brick, they look too new and neat to be real – more like a movie set than homes for real people, let alone HUD-funded housing.”¹⁰⁸

According to the *Washington Post*, when Amy Weinstein first visited the site, she said, “This is nuts. This site does not make sense. Let’s tear it all down and start from

¹⁰⁶ Vernon Loeb, “After Three Decades, The Bulldozers Show Up; Rebuilding of Ellen Wilson Dwellings Begins,” *The Washington Post* (April 3 1996), p. B1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

scratch.”¹⁰⁹ And that is exactly what happened: she started from scratch to transform the site using all of the perceived positives of the surrounding neighborhood. In keeping with the primary objective of HOPE VI and the New Urbanism, she attempted to make the site *not* look like public housing but rather as an extension of the existing neighborhood. With the new Townhomes, Weinstein not only wanted to extend the surrounding neighborhood, but also to mimic the variety of building scale and architectural styles vernacular to Capitol Hill. According to the *Washington Post*, “Her task had a distinct back-to-the-future quality: recreating the vibrancy of the old neighborhood, without the slum housing.”

Weinstein believed that there are certain characteristics that make the rest of the Capitol Hill neighborhood so popular, and she used them to create her guiding design principles. For one, parallel parking was a plus because it provided easily accessible parking as well as a buffer between cars on the street and pedestrians on the sidewalk. Separating the car and the pedestrian was not a driving force in the design as it was with the Ellen Wilson Dwellings. In fact, illustrated by the project's site plan, an important urban design move was the creation of two additional cross streets between 6th and 7th Streets. (Fig. 5.16) The second principle was the provision for many trees, since she believed everybody loved trees for their shade in the summer and their variety of colors in the fall. As early pictures of Ellen Wilson illustrated, trees and landscaping were an essential component of early public housing as well. A common element found throughout Capitol Hill is brick sidewalks, so even though it was a minor addition, she felt that it was a necessary element for the new neighborhood. Finally,

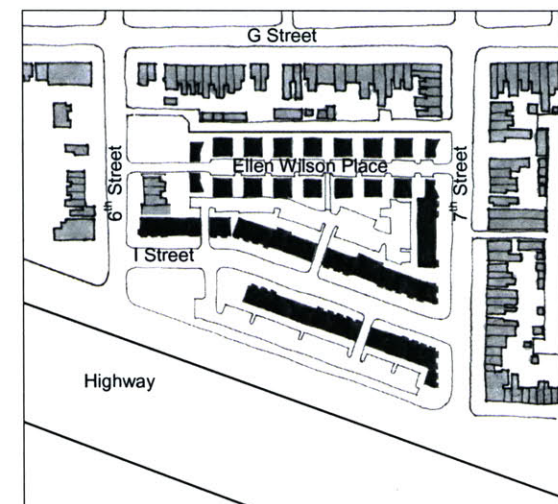


Fig. 5.16 Figure-ground site plan of the Townhomes on Capitol Hill.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

and most importantly, she felt the houses must front onto the streets. This last principle, although common to New Urbanist projects, was not the preferred approach when Ellen Wilson was first built. The housing units usually faced inward toward an internalized courtyard and not onto the street. In fact, it was common to find the back of the units actually facing the street, which according to Oscar Newman contributed to the lack of resident surveillance and the subsequent rise in criminal activity.

The project's two new cross streets were named I Street and Ellen Wilson Place. Just as the former Navy Place neighborhood was reduced to a street sign, so was the project once named in honor of the former first lady. Since her name could no longer be associated with the new Townhomes, naming a street after her was the next best thing. Ellen Wilson Place, the northern-most street, is lined with seven carriage-house duplexes and three-story gatehouses, one at either end. (Fig. 5.17) The development turns its back to the freeway, wrought iron fence trees and other landscaping serve as the buffer between the complex and the highway.

Although many have commended the urban design for the Townhomes, some critics of the architecture, including those who compare the project to a movie set, claim the project tries too hard to be like Capitol Hill. Rather explicit in her intent, Weinstein's goal from the very beginning was "to rebuild the site so that it looked like the rest of the neighborhood." In addition, Weinstein tried to build into the project the kind of architectural diversity and variety of building scale one would find in a more typical neighborhood. (Fig. 5.18) Since she was working with a tight budget, in order to create



Fig. 5.17 View of Ellen Wilson Place in the Townhomes on Capitol Hill.



Fig. 5.18 View of the new I Street in the Townhomes.

¹⁰⁹ Loeb, J1.

the “insta-Victoriana” while maintaining costs, she used 32 different façades and 20 different kinds of brick to vary the project’s five building types. (Fig. 5.19) “We wanted to make it look like different families had lived in the buildings and painted them different colors. That’s what happens in most neighborhoods.”

Common to the barracks to townhouse transformation type, creating the illusion of individually owned units aids in the transformation away from the uniformity of public housing, even if the expression of individuality is artificial. In part contributing to the project’s “fake” and “movie set” appearance is the overemphasis placed on the design of the front façade at the expense of the building’s back or sides. The brick and stone appliqué used on the units’ front facades is not present on the less visible sides in order to minimize the project’s overall cost. This in effect exposes the simple and highly repetitive rectilinear forms existing behind the decorated street front, which are the project’s basic building blocks. This condition is immediately apparent once one steps off of the project’s primary streets. (Figs. 5.20 & 5.21) Within the interior courtyard, one gets glimpses of the “fake” façade treatment projecting higher than the rectilinear box of the housing unit. Contributing to the architectural disconnect between the front and back is the use of vinyl siding rather than a more historically sensitive material. In fact, since the project sits within an historic district, the architect had to apply for a variance to use vinyl siding in place of more costly materials. At Ellen Wilson Dwellings, since the back of the units fronted onto the street, the treatment of the surface was uniform on all exposed sides.

As with earlier public housing, achieving a reduction in the project’s overall cost is of paramount importance. However, unlike with earlier examples, this reduction is



Fig. 5.19 Just a few of the 32 different facades at the Townhomes.



Fig. 5.20 View along highway of the back of the units.

expressed in the architecture of the new public housing in a different way. Rather than expressing the standardization and minimalism that usually results in more affordable housing, which was the case with the earlier modern examples, here the architect tries to hide the fact that the housing is affordable at all. The architect instead tries to achieve an identical look to the more expensive homes in the neighborhood at a much lower cost. Using computerized cutting, the architect was able to create at a minimal cost a series of brackets that support the cornices of the buildings. (Fig. 5.22) The brackets have similar plumed ends and cut-out shapes but are varied in their combination. Also employed were “special-shaped bricks” that give multiple effects from inset columns to checkerboard and alternating patterns creating shadow effects and an inexpensive ornamentation. (Fig. 5.23)

According to Weinstein, “I wanted to design something different and sit back and see if it’s successful. No one is going to say the architecture is in the way.” Answering to criticism that the project looks too new and, therefore, fake, she assures that, with time, the buildings will take on a more weathered look, more like their neighboring counterparts. Weinstein echoes the belief and the driving force behind the HOPE VI program when she says, “So much public housing is being torn down, and certainly high-rises are to blame.” Again, architecture is viewed as the cause of and the solution to the failure of public housing. Weinstein sees her work differently, “My mission has been successful because I’ve removed architecture as a factor in terms of ‘Will this work?’, The real test is when people move in ... That’s when they move from houses to



Fig. 5.21 View from within interior courtyard / parking lot.



Fig. 5.22 Affordable detailing.

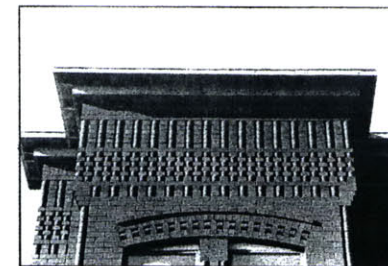


Fig. 5.23 Brick shadow effects give the illusion of a deep cornice line.

homes.” Contrary to what she believes, architecture is a factor as she herself says, “I’m optimistic that it will not be seen as a ‘housing project’ – that’s the whole point.”¹¹⁰

With HOPE VI projects, transforming the people who live there is often seen as just as critical as transforming the architecture. Of the 134 total units, 33 are reserved for the lowest-income families (compared to the 129 units that existed in the former public housing project). According to Arthur Jones, the authority conducted an 18- to 20-month search to find the former residents of Ellen Wilson, since they would have the first priority to come back. Locating the former residents almost ten years after they were evicted from the project was, according to Jones, a considerably daunting task. In the end, 29 of the 45 families were contacted and only eleven of the original residents ultimately qualified and chose to live in the new Townhomes. In what many considered an overly stringent screening process that lasted for months, many of the former tenants were screened out through checks of their credit histories, criminal records and current homes. Ryan Bettez, regional marketing director for Corcoran Jennison, says, “Essentially, they’re checking on a person’s social behavior.”¹¹¹ To be accepted, applicants must not have a criminal record for homicide, rape, kidnapping or assaults against children. They must also show evidence that they have not intentionally damaged property or caused disturbances to neighbors.

If not screened out, many of the former tenants were priced out as a result of the relatively large downpayment required in order to buy into the cooperative and the \$25 charge just to apply. The screening process and required fee are fairly standard in the

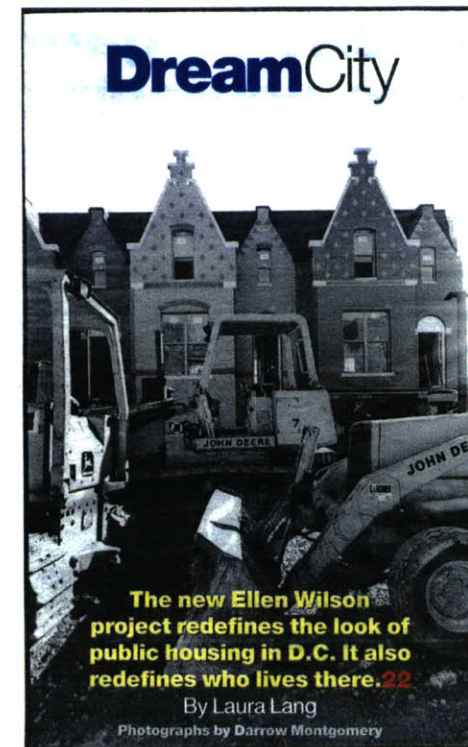


Fig. 5.24 The Townhomes are a “Dream City” for a few public housing tenants.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

private industry, but not for public housing. In an article that appeared in the *Washington City Paper* titled “Dream City”, the author is critical of the transformation: “they’ve not just taken the decay out of public housing – they’ve taken a lot of the public out too.” (Fig. 5.24) The “share price,” which is what the down payment is called, could amount to as much as a three-month payment. As a result of the highly selective screening, the majority of inhabitants of the new project have little resemblance to those living there prior to the transformation. The same author continues, “It’s a persistent downside of housing ‘progress’: poor families displaced when the city promises something better – only not for them. The families who lived in the alley dwellings found out how the story ends. Now, so have the former residents of Ellen Wilson.”¹¹²

¹¹¹ Lang, 30.

¹¹² Ibid., 27.

6

Orchard Park to the Orchard Gardens Estates

Twilight of Slums-

It is obvious that unless the construction of new dwellings is started very shortly on a gigantic scale our city's physical structure will continue to decay and its population to dwindle ...

To oppose, aye, not to actively assist public housing in its crusade to rid the city of substandard areas is to admit, in effect, that Boston is past redemption.

This is neither good morality nor good business for inevitably the octopus will reach out and defile all of our city and it will mark no difference twixt privately or governmentally-owned properties in so doing ...

One thing and one thing alone can put our city back on the road to lost prosperity – modern, decent, safe and sanitary housing on a large scale ...

The endless chain of dirt and decay must be quickly cut by the sharp, clean surgery of new construction.

We have a mandate from destiny. We must exercise it wisely and fully.¹¹³

In Which We Live, Annual Report 1944-1945
Boston Housing Authority



¹¹³ Boston Housing Authority (BHA), *In Which We Live, Annual Report 1944-1945* (Boston, 1945), n.p.

Boston's Symbol of Public Housing HOPE

At the recent HOPE VI Regional Design Training Session held in Boston in November 2000, the city's newly redeveloped Orchard Gardens Estates (formerly Orchard Park) was featured prominently. Beginning with the welcome by Sandra Henriquez, the CEO of the Boston Housing Authority (BHA), the project was highlighted throughout the two-day training session as a leading example of HOPE VI transformation. Accolades for the project's design and community design process came from a number of different sources, not least of which were the program's most vocal supporters: HUD, the CNU and the AIA. In May 2000, HUD and the AIA honored the project with a *Community Building by Design Award*. The award is given to projects that play an "exemplary role in helping to revitalize the communities in which they are located by enhancing the community's physical fabric." The subtext of the award illustrates the ongoing belief that physical improvement will lead to the revitalization of distressed communities. In addition, the project received the 1999 HUD Best Practices Award and the 1999 Builder's Choice Award for excellence in residential design. Possibly the highest honor a project could ever receive is an acknowledgment from the President of the United States. Former President Clinton not only recognized the project, but also made a special visit to see the project for himself when he visited Boston in January 2000. The reason the President gave for visiting the project was that he wanted to draw attention to affordable urban housing that worked.

Out of the Shadows

Boston, like Washington, had already established its housing authority before the Housing Act of 1937. The BHA was established on October 1, 1935 by order of the City Council and approval of the Mayor. The Authority thus became a “public body, politic and corporate”, having the powers of a local authority under the provisions of the Massachusetts Housing Authority Law. Following the passage of the United States Housing Act two years later, the Massachusetts law was amended to conform to the new federal legislation. One of the important changes resulting from the amendment was the significant increase in BHA power and in the funds to realize its goals. The BHA now had the ability to determine which areas are sub-standard, to take them by eminent domain if necessary, and to clear the areas as needed for the eventual construction of new public housing.

In a report reviewing its first five years, the BHA stressed not the construction of new housing, but rather the immediate need for slum clearance. In the first part of the report, the necessity for – and the difficulties of – site clearance are expounded as the BHA insisted “existing buildings must be demolished and the ground cleared.”¹¹⁴ Only once this is achieved can the authority begin the task of actually constructing new homes. Under a section titled, *What is the “Boston Housing Authority”?*, two legal cases are presented affirming the BHA’s power of eminent domain and its right to slum clearance. Excerpts from the cases confirm that “the elimination of the slums can be found to be a direct benefit and advantage to all of the people” and the “real purpose” of

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

the Housing Authority Law was the “elimination of slums and unsafe and unsanitary dwellings.” Later in the report, the BHA made its preference for the clearance of substandard areas over building on vacant land parcels more explicit: “It seemed to be the wisest procedure to develop all of its projects by clearing substandard areas.”¹¹⁵ The rationale given for this decision was due to the difficulties of eliminating an equivalent number of substandard dwellings off-site as required by the USHA.

Armed with the power to do so, the BHA set out to determine which sites in the city were in most need of clearance, since finding the most appropriate sites for public housing was not a primary consideration. Illustrating the Authority’s adherence to the principles of modern design, even with the initial selection of appropriate sites, the BHA writes:

The building of a housing project should not only clear away the greatest number of sub-standard dwellings possible, but it should help to rehabilitate the neighborhood by virtue of its plan, with its open spaces, landscaping, play areas and juxtaposition of its modern buildings.

The text goes even further to suggest that the size of a project should be large enough “to withstand encroaching blight from all sides.” Also, the Authority was confident that housing projects could not only eliminate existing blight but they could also “definitely stop a downward trend of deterioration and blight.” Not only were the new designs to be large and follow modern design principles; they were also to be built to last: “The

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

useful life of a project, properly maintained, shall be not less than the term of the loan which is sixty years.”¹¹⁶

Throughout the report, aerial views of sections of the city were highlighted to illustrate blighted areas to be demolished and eventually replaced with public housing. For example, the site for the South End “Project Mass. 2-6”, later known as the Cathedral Square project, is outlined in white and the shape it produces is then used as part of the overall design of the page itself. (Fig. 6.1) A total of six project sites are presented in this way, reducing the difficult issue of slum clearance to a simple heuristic of graphic design.

The same optimism that existed elsewhere in the country with respect to public housing’s ability to transform the slum inhabitants themselves also existed in Boston. As with other housing authorities, the BHA believed that physically transforming the slums would automatically transform its inhabitants. The BHA saw its task quite clearly: to build “homes in which inherent dignity and character can lift themselves to a higher level of self-esteem and achieve a measure of contentment, community pride and civic responsibility that is impossible of attainment in the bleak, unsanitary dwellings which comprise the worst housing districts.”¹¹⁷

In order to better understand the future tenants of public housing and the conditions in which they were living prior to demolition, the BHA established a rehousing division to gather information concerning family composition and income, rent and condition of



Fig. 6.1 Aerial view of South End site for proposed slum clearance.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

dwellings. This information is useful to give some sense of Boston's "slums." For the BHA's first eight project areas, there were a total of 4,722 dwelling units in a total of 1,859 structures. These numbers indicate that there was an average of about 2.5 dwelling units per structure. According to this same survey, the BHA counted about 13,367 persons living there with an average number of persons per family equal to 3.5. Another set of statistics shows that the average annual family income was \$1149 while the average monthly rent was only \$15.88. Dividing out the number of months reveals that the families were paying on average 16% of their monthly income for shelter, which represents a lower percentage than that generally found in public housing later. Finally, a quick survey of the inhabitants gives some sense of the slum dwellers' attitude toward public housing, as interpreted by the BHA. The survey interviewed 3,660 families, of which only 72 were "antagonistic toward the projects" and a total of 3,495 families were in favor of the projects and planned to apply. According to the survey, roughly 95% of the families surveyed were in favor of public housing.¹¹⁸

Aiding in the overall transformation of the slums into public housing, the BHA was careful in selecting only the most promising slum dwellers to return once the construction of public housing was complete. Although the Authority claimed its actions were for the benefit of all people, due to the relatively small number of available units for the large number of applicants, the BHA had to be highly selective. According to the 1941 report, there were about "12,000 eager applicants" for the 3,291 apartments that were then available.¹¹⁹ Later in the report, it was estimated that there would be a total

¹¹⁷ Boston Housing Authority (BHA), *Rehousing the Low-income Families of Boston* (Boston, 1941), n.p.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

of about 30,000 eligible families for only 5,300 dwelling units once all of the current projects were completed.¹²⁰ Figure 6.2 shows one of the advertisements the BHA used to attract potential applicants. The cover features images of the Authority's housing with its standard modern amenities such as ample green space, play areas for children and kitchens equipped with the latest appliances. Inside the application, the selection criteria are listed: "(A qualified family) must be living in Boston under sub-standard conditions; Its head must be a citizen of the United States; Its total average weekly income must not exceed the limits indicated on the opposite page." In addition, the application states that priority will be given to those applicants who were displaced by slum clearance, provided that they meet the other requirements. In small print further restrictions are given: "Your family should be a natural group of two to nine persons. Relatives are allowed, but lodgers, roomers or unrelated working adults are excluded." With these restrictions many of the former slum dwellers would not qualify to live in the new housing.

In addition to selecting only the most disciplined tenants, many of the projects were designed to facilitate better surveillance in order to prevent or suppress any disorderly conduct. Two images appear revealing how the new project has "no hiding places and alleys – breeding places of crime" while an "older section of the city" is more difficult to patrol. (Fig. 6.3) In the image of the new project, structures are placed far enough apart such that a commissioner sitting in his patrol car can clearly view most of the project grounds. To further prevent unwanted individuals from entering the project, a large sign is posted at one end of the project common warning in big letters that there is "No

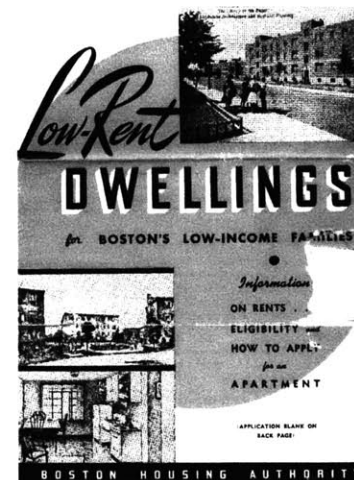


Fig. 6.2 BHA ad for low-rent housing.



Fig. 6.3 Surveillance and police patrolling are made easier in the modern housing project.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Passing Through.” In addition to the sign, the stern facial expressions of the Police Commissioner and the Project Superintendent make it clear that unwanted individuals are not allowed.

One of the more poetic housing authority reports ever produced is the BHA's Annual Report for 1944-1945. Through the artful juxtapositioning of images and text, the report is a provocative assemblage of public housing propaganda. From the very first pairing of images, the contrast between the dark and dreary conditions of the slums and the bright and upbeat conditions of public housing grow stronger with each subsequent page. For example, the first set of images features, at one extreme, an image of an exceptionally narrow and dark alleyway in the city and, at the other extreme, an image of a wide and sunny flowering garden at a BHA project. (Figs. 6.4) Children are featured prominently in each photograph. In the first, a group of children are standing in the shadows; whereas in the latter image, two children are standing underneath a white painted trellis. The following text, both poetic and prophetic, accompanies the two images:

Out of the Shadows...

On Yesteryear ...

The Authority looked briefly over its shoulder with the passing of the year, and then swiftly went on onto the future.

It saw in that one quick backward glance the heartening and everlasting results of nine long, hard pioneering years.

It beheld eight clean, shining Developments rising fresh to the sun where once in dreary, dirt-filled dilapidation slum dwellings had shambled in contaminating hopelessness against a gray and somber sky.

... Into the Sun

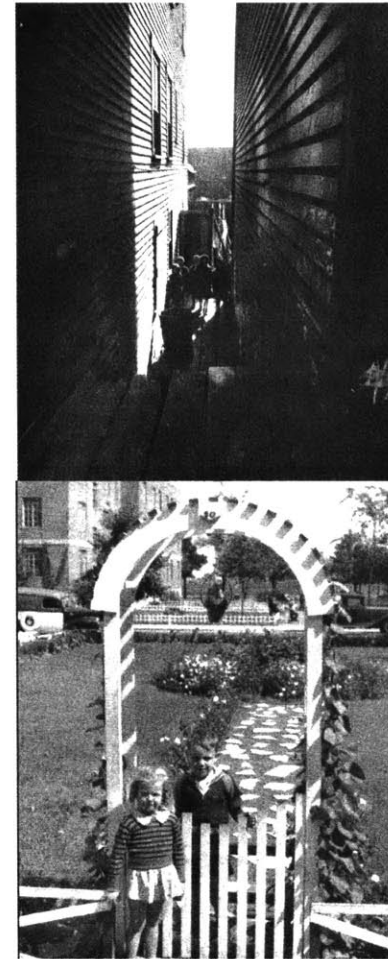


Fig. 6.4 “Out of the shadows” and “Into the sun”.

It saw red brick, green grass and sunlight reflecting on shining window panes where once was rotted, cracked, unpainted wood, cinders and dust and glass, gray-filmed. It saw energy and eagerness for the hope of tomorrow where only yesterday drudgery and despair held sway.

It saw vociferous antagonism yields to silent reproach and watched as this changed too from grudging acquiescence into final open approval.

It heard the strident voice of the doubter fade into thunderous silence. It heard the challenge of tomorrow but knew the achievements of the past were good and strong and would endure forever.

It looked back no more but with confident courage went on into tomorrow.

In the same report, two more sets of images illustrate the BHA's architectural and urban design preferences. With the first set, an image of an alleyway in the old city is contrasted to a second image of a new street in a BHA project. (Figs. 6.5) The former image shows the more typical relationship between the architecture and the street found elsewhere in the city in such places as the Back Bay and the South End. The latter image illustrates the condition favored by the BHA. The buildings are pulled farther back from the street and are not connected in a continuous straight line as before. Rather than alleyways in the second image, it is more common to find greenways with the buildings set within the landscape, rather than up against the street. The street and the buildings are intentionally staggered to give a greater sense of openness to the overall neighborhood. In a second set of images, the BHA's preferences are even more pronounced. (Figs. 6.6) The first image is again a fairly typical view of the old city and the second image is a view of the new BHA property in Charlestown. With the first image, although today it could easily be mistaken for a preferred street in Beacon Hill, was labeled then as "Old Narrow and Confined." The second image labeled "New Spacious and Open," epitomized the modern environment preferred by the BHA.



Fig. 6.5 Old alleyways are replaced with new, wide street promenades.

Project Mass. 2-5

Although not placed in as prime a location as Washington DC's Ellen Wilson project, the site for Boston's Orchard Park was nonetheless well-appointed. Originally known as Project Mass. 2-5, the 774-unit Orchard Park was located in what was originally a racially mixed area of the Roxbury section of Boston. The site was well-positioned because it is only a few blocks away from the bustling Dudley Square, an important commercial and transportation center in this part of the city. Because of the racially mixed neighborhood, the BHA attempted to mimic the mix by making the Orchard Park project "bi-racially segregated." This meant that four contiguous buildings were reserved for "Negro" occupancy and the rest were reserved for whites. Although this might initially sound like a small proportion for non-white residents, it is important to note that, in 1940, the city's non-white population only amounted to 3%.¹²¹

According to the 1941 BHA Report, the site for Orchard Park was selected because "the area was fast becoming severely blighted." (Fig. 6.7) Although nowhere in the report is "severely blighted" actually defined. Nor is the related idea of "*becoming* severely blighted." The BHA's word is sufficient to justify their actions. Unlike the Ellen Wilson project, this neighborhood did not have the notoriety that Navy Place had had. In fact, if one looks at photographs of the site before demolition, it is not immediately apparent that the neighborhood is blighted or *becoming* blighted at all. (Fig. 6.8) The images show a well-textured neighborhood with a variety of housing types from the



Fig. 6.6 "Old narrow and confined" becomes "New, spacious and open".

¹²¹ Vale (2000), 194.

triple-decker to the row house. The texture and variety are also evident in the plan view of the neighborhood. (Fig. 6.9) Significantly, according to the images and the plan, the neighborhood is not merely made up of residences, but instead contains a mix of uses. One image shows a neighborhood corner store, the icon of the traditional mixed-use neighborhood. (Fig. 6.10) Although its loss is often lamented today by many of the New Urbanists, the return to the corner store has not occurred with as much fervor as the return to more traditional housing forms, at least not with HOPE VI.

The project site was roughly took the shape of a bow tie – that is, it was divided into two sections – and contained approximately 15.72 acres. Like the other proposed sites for housing projects, the BHA used an aerial view of the site to indicate the boundaries of the project. (Fig. 6.11) However, in the Orchard Park site, only the eastern-most section of the overall site is shown. Underneath the image, other factors are listed that were used to determine the site. For one, the site was affordable and was able to be purchased for under \$1.50 per square foot, the limit set by the USHA. Another reason, which also illustrates the Authority's ability to put a positive spin on anything, was that the new Roxbury Crosstown Highway was relocated by the city "to form a splendid boundary for the project." The site's adjacency to the Dudley Street Terminal of the Boston Elevated Railway was an additional determining factor. Finally, the site was well situated to allow for the development of "the desirable super-blocks and eliminate through traffic."¹²²



Fig. 6.7 Location plan of Orchard Park site in Roxbury. The site is indicated as 2-5.



Fig. 6.8 View of neighborhood before slum clearance.

¹²² BHA (1941).

In the back of the same report, an aerial perspective rendering illustrates the proposed design. (Fig. 6.12) The only remnants of the former neighborhood are the existing schools and the park, although the boundaries of the park have been blurred. In effect, the park is now spread across the entire project site and is no longer limited to the original Orchard Park. The architecture of the project is representative of early public housing design: low-scale, three-story and uniform across all of the buildings. The site design is also representative of early projects. (Fig. 6.13) The buildings essentially run parallel to each other and mostly run north and south, leaving wide strips of green space between all of the buildings. The total land coverage is only 31.4%. The buildings zigzag to create a highly geometric composition that contrasts significantly with the surrounding context. For the most part, interior streets have been removed to create the superblock except for a few to service the project's interior.

An image of Orchard Park appears in the BHA's 1949 annual report, (Fig. 6.14) The initial date of occupancy for the project was November 1, 1942, and overall, the project housed a total of 3,351 residents. The average monthly rent for the project was \$42.63 when it opened, representing a significant jump from the average of \$15.88 per month across all eight BHA properties just a couple years before. Again, as with Ellen Wilson, if the former tenants were not screened out, they would likely be excluded *ipso facto* due to the higher rents.

Although built to last more than sixty years, the project's buildings began to show serious signs of decay in less than half the time. According to Lawrence Vale's study of Boston public housing, many of the city's projects that started out predominantly white



Fig. 6.9 Figure-ground plan of Orchard Park site prior to demolition, 1919.



Fig. 6.10 Neighborhood corner store on site before demolition.

changed significantly during the 60's. Orchard Park was no exception. The project was still only 12% nonwhite in 1957 but, by 1970, it had jumped to almost 90% nonwhite. In a move to prevent a shift to all-black occupancy, 335 Orchard Park tenants sent a petition to the BHA in June 1964:

We, the tenants of the Orchard Park Housing Development, would like to make it known that we feel that Negro and White people can live together harmoniously. We have demonstrated that people of good will, regardless of race or cultural background, can and will work with one another to achieve a decent neighborhood. Therefore, we are asking for co-operation from the Boston Housing Authority to help maintain a racial balance in this development.¹²³

Despite efforts by the tenants, the shift to almost all-black occupancy would eventually happen. However, under the HOPE VI program, achieving a greater diversity among residents would finally be possible, although not racial diversity as desired by the tenants but rather income diversity.

Orchard Park to Orchard Gardens Estates

Although not as high-profile as either Ellen Wilson or Cabrini-Green, Orchard Park became just as notorious within the city of Boston. By the 1990s, the project was considered to be one of the most severely distressed developments in the BHA's portfolio, both physically and socioeconomically. (Fig. 6.15) According to Deborah Goddard, the HOPE VI Program Director at the BHA, the very name "Orchard Park" became "synonymous with crime." Although neither as explicit nor as poetic as the



Fig. 6.11 Aerial view of pre- "Project Mass. 2-5" slum.



Fig. 6.12 Aerial rendering of proposed project in 1941.

¹²³ Vale (2000), 321.

earlier BHA analogy between the slums and an “octopus”, the distress at Orchard Park was also described as spreading out from a central core of blight: “the distress at Orchard Park had spread into the surrounding neighborhoods and they, too, had fallen into a state of disrepair and abandonment.” One resident, who had lived in the project since it opened in 1942, told a local reporter about the last time the BHA promised to renovate Orchard Park with new green space: “It was easily done: the trucks rolled in one day, poured concrete over the dirt and weeds, and then poured green paint over the concrete.”¹²⁴

Although the project was considered to be one of the worst in the city, the Orchard Park Tenants’ Association was one of the most effective resident organizations in Boston, and was ultimately responsible for agitating for the neighborhood’s transformation. This illustrates an important distinction between HOPE VI and earlier efforts, alluded to earlier. Under HOPE VI, the current residents of a given site are empowered to join the redevelopment process and, in the best-case scenario, become active partners. From the very beginning of the process, the Tenants’ Association worked closely with the BHA to realize the kind of change it had originally hoped for decades earlier.

The first phase of redevelopment at Orchard Park actually began before the HOPE VI program, and was instead part of a Comprehensive Modernization project. This earlier phase reflected the relatively limited nature of transformation originally envisioned by HUD. The first phase included the gut rehab of nine buildings and was completed in December 1996. Since the existing structures remained, the architects were limited in

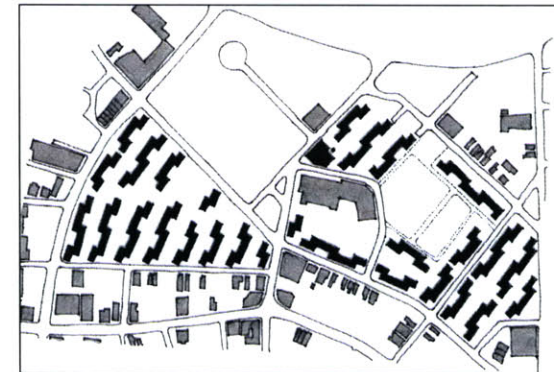


Fig. 6.13 Figure-ground site plan of Orchard Park.



Fig. 6.14 View of Orchard Park in 1949.



Fig. 6.15 Deteriorated physical condition at Orchard Park just prior to HOPE VI.

¹²⁴ David G. Yosifon, “Orchard Gardens Opens New Homes,” *Bay State Banner* (December 3, 1998), n.p.

their ability to transform the architecture and erase the public housing stigma attached to the buildings. Transforming the institutional nature of the buildings was achieved through subtler but equally effective means. (Fig. 6.16) The roofs were pitched, front porches were added and new colored and textured panels were applied in an attempt to breakdown the buildings' monotony. The grounds of the site were also transformed to create a layering of public to private exterior spaces. Although erasing the stigma of the project was an important goal, the level of image transformation later deemed critical was not yet seen to be as pressing. This was mainly because the first phase was not planned to be mixed-income, and therefore did not need to compete in the broader housing market.

The HOPE VI program was exactly what the BHA had been waiting for, for it "provided an extraordinary opportunity to change the very nature of the neighborhood." The revitalization of Orchard Park could now be seen as a catalyst for revitalizing the entire Lower Roxbury area. According to the BHA, "The plan for Orchard Park is much more than rebuilding distressed public housing. The plan is truly a neighborhood revitalization strategy." The two most important objectives for the Authority now possible under HOPE VI were "creating a viable and truly mixed-income community" and "augmenting HUD funds with private debt and/or equity investment." Through leveraging the HUD funds with private investment and other public investment, the BHA sought to make public housing less apparent.¹²⁵ In addition, since only 326 of the 708 apartments were occupied at the time of redevelopment, the mixed-income model was financially and politically feasible. Since HUD no longer required one-for-one



Fig. 6.16 View of the Comprehensive Modernization phase.

¹²⁵ Vale (2000), 373.

replacement for all demolished public housing units, the BHA was able to replace much of the former public housing with a series of privately managed mixed-income housing developments. According to the BHA, private management was key for the overall transformation: “We believed that in order to attract a private developer/owner, market-rate residents and investors, we had to have private management at Orchard Park.”¹²⁶ This decision would effectively serve to effectively remove the BHA from the site altogether.

A Typical Urban Family Housing Neighborhood

After receiving a HOPE VI implementation grant in 1995, the BHA set out to re-image Orchard Park as the new Orchard Gardens Estates. To achieve this, the BHA first established a set of careful design guidelines in order to solicit proposals from development teams. First and foremost, according to the BHA’s request for proposal, the development team should “reorganize the site to create a typical urban family housing neighborhood, one which cannot be readily recognized as ‘public housing’.”¹²⁷ In addition the BHA called for the “complete redevelopment of the current site” achieved through the demolition of everything on site except for the rehabbed units completed during Phase 1. The original site boundaries will be “expanded” to accommodate 331 housing units of a “scope and scale reflective of neighborhood standards.” Finally, “the development will no longer be structured as a ‘superblock’ with limited access and the attendant safety compromises.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ BHA insert, HOPE VI Regional Design Training Manual (Boston, 2001), p. 6.

¹²⁷ BHA, *HOPE VI RFP* (February 2, 1996), p. 8.

¹²⁸ BHA insert, 2.

In 1996 the Housing Authority and the Orchard Park Tenants Association selected a private development team in accordance with established guidelines. The team included the developer Madison Trinity Ventures, the project architect Domenech Hicks & Krockmalnic (DHK), the property manager agent Maloney Properties and legal counsel Hale & Dorr. Started in 1997, the second on-site phase included the demolition of eight buildings and the construction of 90 new units. By the end of 1998, all 90 units were occupied. The third on-site phase included the demolition of 11 buildings and the rehabilitation of a historic building, the Dearborn School, as 115 units of new housing. The third phase was completed by the end of 1999 and is also fully occupied at the time of writing. Off-site development, named Orchard Commons, is part of the “expanded” plan. It consists of two phases and will provide 115 units of rental housing, spread over 50 vacant city-owned parcels. The architect for the off-site housing is, again, DHK, a firm known in the area for its work in affordable housing design. Also, as part of the larger neighborhood plan, homeownership units will be provided throughout the surrounding neighborhood.

In a recent article in *Builder* magazine, titled *House Proud*, the project’s main architect, Fernando Domenech, discussed his objectives for the redesign of Orchard Park. Echoing the guidelines put forth by the BHA, Domenech’s main objective was to erase the site’s public housing stigma through its complete transformation. Beginning at the level of urban design, the architect followed a number of the design principles now fully adopted and promoted by the New Urbanism. (Fig. 6.17) First, he set out to break down the superblock by bringing many of the surrounding streets through the site. According

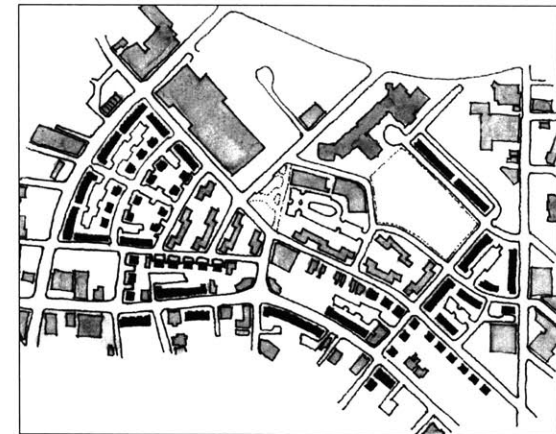


Fig. 6.17 Figure-ground site plan of Orchard Gardens.

to Domenech, “We brought the scale of the blocks back and reestablished vital connections.”¹²⁹ A variety of housing typologies from the rowhouse to the duplex were used in an attempt to mimic the diversity of housing types existing elsewhere in Lower Roxbury. For example, the westernmost section of the site includes a combination of rowhouses along the site’s perimeter, with fourteen semi-detached homes arranged symmetrically around a new street. Although the architect attempted to “blend” the project into its context, the whole composition is highly symmetrical and atypical in comparison to its larger context. In addition, the height and density of the abutting architecture tends to be much greater, which further contributes to the project’s acontextual and highly discernible character. (Fig. 6.18)



Fig. 6.18 Acontextual edge condition.

In addition the varying the housing types, the architect also tried to create variety in the treatment of the architectural elevations. As Weinstein attempted with the Townhomes on Capitol Hill, Domenech tried to create the appearance of individual expression at Orchard Gardens. However, rather than achieve this through complex variation in the building façades as Weinstein, Domenech instead chose to use color. (Fig. 6.19) According to Domenech, “Bold color is an effective and economical way to set individual units apart.” No hue is repeated on adjacent units, resulting in a virtual rainbow of colors throughout the site. Critics of the bold colors claim that the project stands out again as before, and that this is just another way the project can be easily identified as low-income housing. Regardless of one’s personal views about the colors used, the bold colors undoubtedly help achieve the kind of bold transformation hoped for by both the project’s residents and the BHA.



Fig. 6.19 Bold color makes Orchard Gardens stand out.

¹²⁹ Carolyn Weber, “House Proud,” *Builder* (Jan, 1998).

At its most extreme, the transformation in the architecture is an example of the “barracks-to-detached-single-family-house” type, or rather in this case, barracks-to-duplex. Although the end result has the appearance of single-family homes, the homes are actually comprised of two units each. (Fig. 6.20) According to Domenech, “These units feel like individual homes. You can point to your own door.”¹³⁰ Of the three case studies employed in this investigation, the Orchard Gardens example arguably represents the greatest symbolic shift in the architecture. Originally, housing that more closely resembled barracks in both form and shared communal living has been turned into the ultimate image of the American domestic dream. Domenech believes that “a sense of identity and ownership is especially important in this type of development. We tried to give them truly defensible space.” From the colorful architecture down to the extensive use of white picket fencing, there is little question about the obligatory individual expression or boundaries between each individual unit and exterior private space. (Fig. 6.21) Whether an expression of identity, defensibility, or just good marketing, one thing seems certain: The switch from mostly public space to mostly private results in a startling transformation in both the project’s ideology and image.



Fig. 6.20 The image of the single-family home is explicit in the Estates.



Fig. 6.21 White picket fencing is a predominant element defining the semi-private/public spaces from the more public.

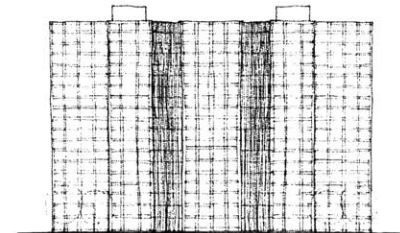
¹³⁰ Ibid.

7

Cabrini-Green to the Old Town Village

Cabrini, adored by its residents but downed by outsiders, needing to recognize and realize and open their eyes wider. Our neighborhood is not just gangbanging, drug dealing and full of negativity, it has after-school programs, softball teams and other extracurricular activities.¹³¹

Cabrini-Green: in Words and Pictures,
Bradore "Hush" Thompson



¹³¹ David T. Whitaker, *Cabrini-Green in Words and Pictures* (Chicago: W3 Chicago, 2000), p. 1.

Make No Little Plans

When one thinks of public housing in Chicago, one likely conjures up images of extremely distressed high-rise apartment buildings. Hollywood film producers and authors often head to Chicago when they want to capture the “true” urban ghetto, or at least what the media perceives it to be. From *Hoop Dreams* to *The American Project*, Chicago’s public housing more than any other city’s has been and continues to be the backdrop for film and written accounts of the atrocities of life in the “projects.” Throughout the city’s history, legendary urban planners, architects and public housing advocates have continued to make Chicago a testing ground for large and imminently high-profile visionary experiments. From Daniel Burnham to Elizabeth Wood to Mies Van Der Rohe, Chicago is a place where big plans are not only imagined but also realized.

Today, Chicago is undergoing the kind of public housing transformation that is unmatched anywhere else in the country, both in terms of scale and image. For scale, the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) plans to demolish all of its mid- to high-rise housing. In the words of the CHA’s Deputy Director of Communications, “Anything over fourteen stories we will tear down and we will replace them with low-rise three- to four-story townhouse mixed-income developments.” The citywide plan will receive about \$1.6 billion from HUD over the next 10 years to produce more than 25,000 new or renovated housing units in mixed-income developments throughout the city. For image, projects like Cabrini-Green, better known as places of gang activity and violent crime, are being replaced by halcyon images of safe yuppie havens where rich and poor alike

can live and shop in perfect harmony. However, as will be illustrated through a closer look at Cabrini-Green, the large-scale makeover currently underway under HOPE VI might well be a remarkable image transformation, but it is only the most recent in the long history of Chicago public housing.

Chicago Can Build ...

Chicago is legendary for being able to build and rebuild itself according to the prevailing whims of the powers-that-be. Once the fastest growing city in America, the original form of the city served it well, as its gridiron plan could be easily extended to accommodate any sudden population growth. Few questioned the form of the city until events like the Great Fire of 1871 led to a deeper ambivalence about the new cities that increasingly dominated the nineteenth-century cultural landscape. The gridiron was also blamed by many of the city's residents for the city's congestion and overcrowding.

Already by 1909, Daniel Burnham had called into question not only the form of the city, but also the living conditions for many of the city's residents. His famous Plan of Chicago speaks of the changing attitudes toward the form of the city as a result of its hurried growth. According to Burnham, the city must now correct the "intolerable conditions which invariably arise from a rapid growth of population."¹³² More specifically, the plan reflects how attitudes toward living conditions in the city were changing. For the first time, the "problems" of the city were viewed as elements that could be corrected through design:

¹³² Daniel Hudson Burnham, *Plan of Chicago* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), p. 18.

The slum exists today only because of the failure of the city to protect itself against gross evils and known perils, all of which should be corrected by the enforcement of simple principles of sanitation...¹³³

Following in Burnham's footsteps, Elizabeth Wood, one of Chicago's better-known advocates for public housing, made use of his famous motto "Make no little plans" in a 1936 newsletter for the Metropolitan Housing Council (MHC). Wood was the executive director of the MHC before heading up the newly formed CHA a year later. Arguing for a more comprehensive approach to attacking the city's slums, the report spells out how the Council plans to proceed somewhere between "...a belief that the entire center of the city is dead and only fit for clearance and for rebuilding" and "a program that seeks to salvage those thirty-six square miles."¹³⁴ In the newsletter, an image of a deteriorating street front identifies the beginnings of a slum as the caption reads "Not Yet a Slum – But Slipping." (Fig. 7.1)

As stated in a 1940 report by the CHA, the push to achieve the most efficient form of housing is the primary objective of the authority: "Not until rents are driven as low as efficiency and good sense can drive them can the Authority fully achieve its objective, and its obligation under the law – the housing of the lowest income group."¹³⁵ As the same report illustrates, transforming the citizens is critical to the overall transformation of the slum neighborhood. Under the heading "Housing as an Educational Process," the CHA writes, "This educational process begins the day the new tenant moves into the project." After an initial welcome, the project manager "thoroughly explains why the



Fig. 7.1 "Not yet a slum – but slipping."

¹³³ Ibid., 108-109.

¹³⁴ Metropolitan Housing Council of Chicago, *Newsletter*, v. 3, no. 1 (February 15, 1936), p. 8.

¹³⁵ Chicago Housing Authority, *Annual Report, 1940* (Chicago, 1940), n.p.

public has assumed the responsibility of re-housing low income families.”¹³⁶ Without revealing exactly why, the report makes it clear that the tenants will have to reciprocate by being good citizens. Under the heading, “Good Homes are Building Good Citizens,” the report goes on to describe how the tenants are acquiring “an attitude of respect and pride for property.” One way the changing attitudes are measured is by looking at the tenant’s housekeeping patterns. An inspection of the apartments at the time the report was written reveals that 70% of the housekeepers are excellent and that less than 5% can be classified as poor housekeepers.”¹³⁷

While the earlier projects offered relatively bold attempts to transform slum dwellers into good citizens, later images would reveal how transforming the poor required a similar boldness in the architecture. Two cartoons found in the 1942-1943 Annual Report of the Women’s Joint Committee on Adequate Housing illustrate the architectural shift. The cartoon representing the slum shows a single detached house in the middle of children playing in what appears to be a pile of trash, and in the background the smokestacks of the industrial city. (Fig. 7.2) Minus the signs of decay, the pitched-roof house is the familiar image of the traditional American private home. In contrast, and next to the heading “Work for the City of the Future,” is an image of the future city without slums. (Fig. 7.3) Called “Little Utopia,” the future city is represented by flat-roofed modern public housing set within a landscape of trees and grassy play areas. The sun shines brightly over the modern city whereas a dark cloud of pollution and filth surrounds the traditional slum.



Fig. 7.2 A traditional slum...

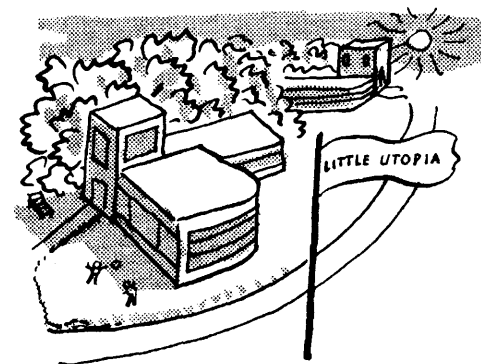


Fig. 7.3 ...and a modern utopia.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 25.

In a booklet entitled *Remaking Chicago*, featuring a series of articles reprinted from the *Chicago Daily News* from February 13 to March 6, 1945, the image of the future city with its public housing is even more distinct. In Chapter One, titled “Bold Attack on Blight,” the drastic measures believed to be necessary are expounded:

The campaign against blight and related urban evils must be as big in scale, as are the problems. Every phase of the attack – planning, land acquisition and building – must be conceived and carried out with a boldness hitherto never contemplated.¹³⁸

The cover image from the Chicago Plan Commission illustrates exactly how bold the change envisioned. (Fig. 7.4) The only visible remnant of the traditional city is a church, whereas everything else has been cleared to make room for the modern city. Low- to mid-rise housing blocks in every shape and configuration from the slab to the cruciform are interspersed among trees, wide boulevards and highways.

In Chapter Fifteen of the same booklet, which looks more directly at the “impact of public housing,” Elizabeth Wood declares, “the urgent need for relieving human distress in blighted areas is the real reason for public housing.”¹³⁹ In the year that the article was written, Wood asked for the CHA to erect an additional 40,000 housing units. The article goes on to say how Wood has furnished impressive statistics showing how public housing has reduced human distress and subsequently improved the city as a whole. Although no specific statistics are given, it is mentioned that “juvenile delinquency, adult crimes, fires and hazards to health have been sharply cut in the projects.” What is not

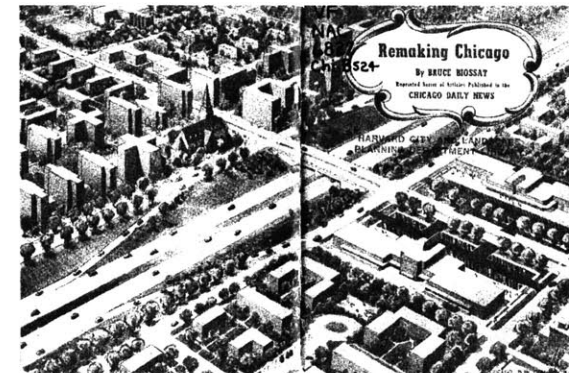


Fig. 7.4 Chicago Plan Commission rendering of a modern Chicago, 1945.

¹³⁸ Bruce Blossat, *Remaking Chicago*, Reprinted Series of Articles Published in the *Chicago Daily News* (Chicago: Chicago Daily News, 1945), p. 1.

mentioned is that many of the delinquents, criminals and less responsible former residents were not allowed back into the new housing to begin with – as in the other case studies, through restrictive screening. Further argumentation for drastic measures comes when the CHA attempts to appease the growing dissatisfaction among the private building industry. The building industry is concerned that public housing will be viewed as superior to a “second-hand” house. Wood believes the impact of this might be lessened by the demolition of all blighted structures so that the “contrast between new public housing and the remaining old houses then will not be so great.”¹⁴⁰ In an article that appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* in 1954, The Citizens’ Committee to Fight Slums, which was an organization appointed by the mayor, stated what it believed the alternatives to be: “Chicago can be a beautiful and modern city, or it can be a decayed has-been, crime-racked, disease-ridden, unsightly, uninspiring and unpleasant.” The organization goes even further to say, “the problem is complicated by the ignorance, dejection and sloth of many slum dwellers.”¹⁴¹

The images promoted thus far are later picked up and put into action by the organization with the power and the funding to make them real. Annual reports leading up to and during the period when the CHA built much of the city’s high-rise public housing, and in effect “remade” Chicago, reveals the same kind of rhetoric and imaging. Already referred to in Chapter Three, the Authority’s 1950 Annual Report entitled *Chicago Can Build* is particularly provocative. A set of images illustrates how an alley in the slums can be transformed into a garden-like setting by building new public

¹³⁹ Ibid, 39.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 40.

housing. (Fig. 7.5) In a 1951 report by the CHA, the Authority states with pride that it has “directly cleared nearly 60 blocks of blight, and under its approved new program will double this amount.”¹⁴² Years later, the CHA happily reports that it had “a record year in construction” with contracts totaling \$32,619,727 in one year to build more than 3,000 additional units.¹⁴³

Outside of New York, the shift to high-rise public housing was probably most tangibly realized in the city of Chicago, which is not an entirely foreign concept to a city known as “the birthplace of the skyscraper.” Although the first skyscrapers were built for commercial use, it was just a matter of time before the building type would be modified as housing. Although never viewed as the ideal housing form for families with children, some of the advantages of the form were nevertheless promoted. The CHA writes:

While skyscraper living may not be ideal for the family with children, it has advantages that should not be overlooked. Tall buildings permit the Authority to meet the density requirements imposed by federal regulation and still not crowd the land. The playground, gardens and wide courtyards give a pleasant airiness to the development far different from the cluttered grid pattern of streets and alleys surrounding the project ... The galleries – which eliminate the need for inside corridors – give each family ready access to the out-of-doors. An open porch on the nineteenth floor is convenient play space for small children under mother’s watchful eye. It is pleasant “sitting out” space for adults. Moreover, it adds zest to living in the new home for some families who formerly had to come out of basements to see daylight.¹⁴⁴

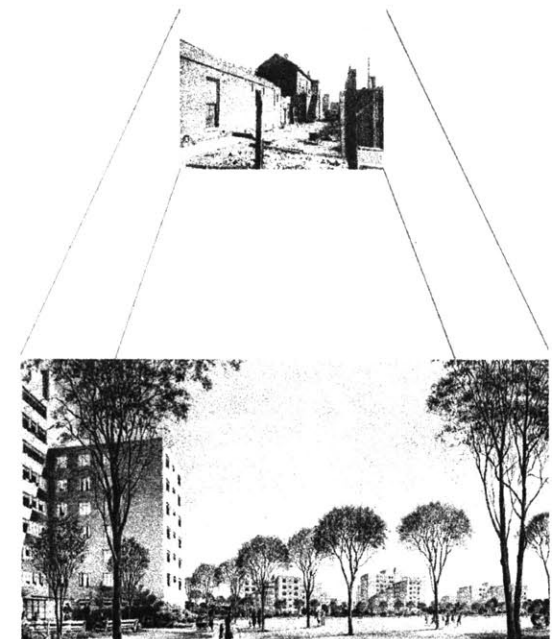


Fig. 7.5 Nature infiltrates the city and helps to erase the urban blight of the slum.

¹⁴¹ John S. Knight, *To Fight Slums: A Great Program* (Chicago: Chicago Daily News, February 2, 1954), p. 14.

¹⁴² CHA, *Annual Report* (1951).

¹⁴³ CHA, *Annual Report* (1956).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*

Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, who like Gropius had been a former head of the Bauhaus, also had a tremendous influence on the design of high-rise housing in Chicago. He had come to the Chicago back in 1937, the same year the CHA was formed, to head up the School of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). With Mies came the teachings of the Bauhaus and the Modern movement and the continued pursuit of a non-historical architecture of functionalism, in which a new sense of space could be created with the help of modern materials. Mies also brought the famous German planner, urban designer and fellow-Bauhauser Ludwig Hilberseimer, to teach at IIT many of the urban design principles that would later be practiced at the Cabrini Extension. In 1949, Mies Van der Rohe designed the Lake Shore Drive Apartments, a high-rise luxury housing project that epitomized the ideals of the movement. (Fig. 7.6) Although the CHA would never be able to repeat the same kind of luxurious design as Mies', both for monetary and political reasons, the basic form was nonetheless the same.

Under Mies' reign, new explorations in housing undertaken at IIT were more concerned with internalizing the public functions that once existed on the street in the corridors of the low-rise slab and high-rise housing forms. Particularly in affordable housing, achieving greater efficiencies in the design was celebrated on the pages of important architectural journals of the time. For example, a study from IIT was published in *Architecture* magazine in 1951. (Fig. 7.7) The featured architects, A. Epstein & Sons, would come to design the first phase of the Cabrini Extension just four years later. The minimalist approach hailed by the Modernists meshed well with the CHA's coincident desire for achieving affordability in design and construction.



Fig. 7.6 Mies' Lake Shore Drive Apartments, 1949.

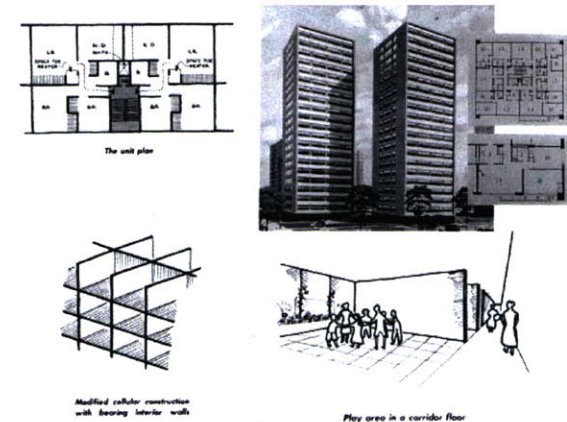


Fig. 7.7 *Architecture* experiments with modern high-rise and efficient housing.

From Little Hell to Cabrini-Green

The Near North Side site where Cabrini-Green now sits has had a long history of being a location for transient poverty. Since the area was first settled by German immigrants in the 1840's, it has seen subsequent groups come and go. Following the Germans came the Irish, then the Swedes, and finally the Italians.¹⁴⁵ Throughout each cycle of settlement, the area remained a place on the city's fringe that served as a gateway for newly arrived immigrants seeking to benefit from the city's booming economy. However, like Navy Place in Washington, Little Hell was described as a place to be avoided. As its nickname suggests, the place was perceived to be one of the city's worst slums, with some 3,500 families living in dreadfully cramped conditions. Furthermore, the neighborhood was viewed as a hotbed for criminal activity, so much so, in fact, that one of the area's intersections was nicknamed "Death Corner" because of the number of murders reputed to have taken place there.¹⁴⁶ The neighborhood, long a thorn in the city's side, was a prime location for urban transformation.

In 1941, the CHA began building the first phase of the Cabrini-Green project, naming it the Francis Cabrini Homes after Mother Cabrini, known throughout the Near North neighborhood as a social worker among immigrants. The project, originally built as temporary housing for working-class veterans and their families, consisted of 55 two- and three-story housing slabs with a total of 584 townhouse units. (Fig. 7.8) The CHA



Fig. 7.8 Aerial view of Cabrini rowhouses.

¹⁴⁵ Before the neighborhood was known as Little Hill, it was first known as Little Sicily because of the large number of Sicilians living in the area.

¹⁴⁶ Whitaker, D., 5.

stipulated that 75% of the project would be restricted to white families and 25% for black families. At the time this project was viewed as a model for integrated public housing. By now, the city had seen a considerable increase in the number of African-American families migrating to the North and Midwest in search of a better life. Although African-Americans were initially relegated to the city's South Side, over time they began to settle in other parts of the city, including the Near North area. Over time, as more African-American families moved into the neighborhood, the Italian families moved out, perpetuating the segregated legacy that the Cabrini Home project originally sought to rectify.

The design of the project represented a rather dramatic break from the conditions found previously. (Fig. 7.9) A total of ten city blocks were demolished, clearing away any remnants of the former neighborhood. The slabs were built on a superblock created through the consolidation of the ten city blocks into one. The interior two-story slabs were arranged in parallel lines, while the perimeter three-story slabs created internalized courtyards much like the Ellen Wilson Dwellings in Washington. The architecture of the buildings was stripped of any detailing so as not to appear too reminiscent of previous styles or too expensive, which is why the project would later be likened to military barracks. (Fig. 7.10)

Although viewed as “barracks” today, written accounts in and around the Cabrini Homes shortly after the project was completed give a sense of how some viewed the project back then. One account is by a professor and his students from a junior college

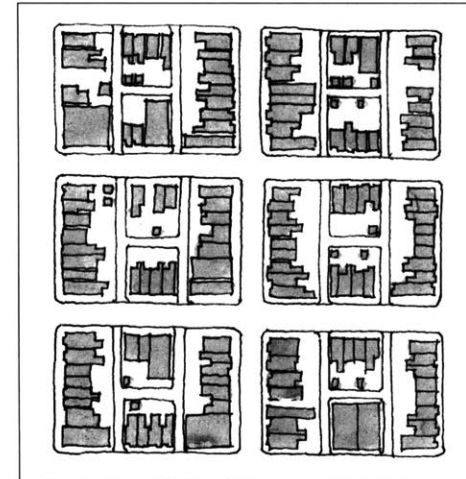


Fig. 7.9 Figure-ground diagram of representative Near North slum housing pattern. Although the block dimensions are fairly consistent, the housing form is relatively diverse.



Fig. 7.10 A photograph of opening day at Cabrini Homes, 1942. This view illustrates the minimalist design in the housing architecture.

in suburban Chicago in 1945. The students were studying sociology and wanted to get firsthand information of what life was like in the Chicago slums. The professor writes,

These boys and girls, these citizens of tomorrow, these future doctors, nurses, mechanics, teachers, social workers, lawyers, clerks, ministers and law-makers came from their own modern, cozy and comfortable homes in a world of sunshine and roses to one of darkness and dirt...¹⁴⁷

The professor goes on to write, "Little white and Negro children were coming home from school. Arm in arm they toddled along, some to the only bright spot – the Francis Cabrini Homes...but most of the children were forced to go to their old shacks."¹⁴⁸ Again, the city and its streets are viewed not as places for public gathering but rather as places for potential danger: "Hawkers hollering, children playing in dangerous streets and filthy alleys, playing with bon-fires and dodging cars or trucks. But, WHERE ELSE were these little children to PLAY?"¹⁴⁹ When they arrived at Cabrini Homes, the contrast was welcomed. He writes, "Truly, as some of the students remarked – here was a bit of 'heaven.' Just a few minutes ago all we could see was decay and degradation and now – 'another world.'"¹⁵⁰ (Fig. 7.11) Echoing the same views as the CHA, the professor believed that large-scale demolition was necessary in order to successfully turn the neighborhood around. He writes,



Fig. 7.11 "A bit of heaven" at Cabrini Homes. Photo taken in 1945.

¹⁴⁷ Louis Kurtz, "Forgotten Neighborhoods: What Can Be Done About Them!" (Chicago: Louis Kurtz, 1945), p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

It was apparent that any reconstruction or rehabilitation of the surrounding communities was well nigh impossible until this “core” of blight had been removed. A slum clearance project here would remove the threat of blight to the “Gold Coast” neighborhoods to the east.¹⁵¹

In 1950, the CHA also conducted a fairly extensive survey of the conditions existing in the neighborhood. The survey was completed in an attempt to document the conditions of the slum, as well as to justify the large-scale demolition required for the next phase of development known as the Cabrini Extension. An aerial view of the Near North neighborhood was included in the report to indicate the overall boundaries of the development. (Fig. 7.12) Some additional informative statistics were given in the report including, for example, how the neighborhood changed from 20% African-American in 1940 to 79% in 1950.¹⁵² The report also indicates how Cabrini Homes helped to “slow down the transition of the area to an all-Negro neighborhood” since the composition of the project remains the same at 75% white and 25% black in contrast to 20% white in the area.¹⁵³ An image of the neighborhood is presented with the caption, “Streets of dreariness characterize the Cabrini Extension Area. (Fig. 7.13)

It wasn't long after the “core of blight” was surveyed that it was hastily removed. As one author writes, “The Chicago Housing Authority responded to a big problem with big solutions.”¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Wood described the plan to bring high-rises to public housing as a way to create “islands in a wilderness of slums.”¹⁵⁵ Beginning in 1955, the Cabrini

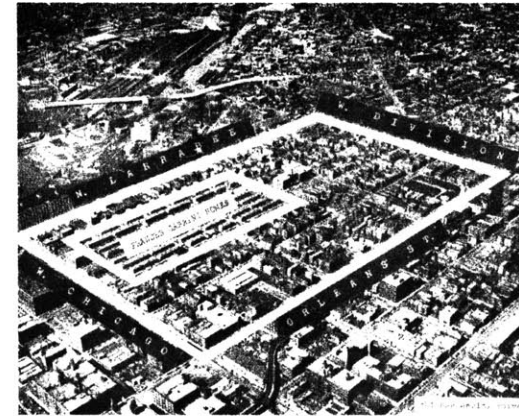


Fig. 7.12 The original scope of the Cabrini Extension project that would later extend farther to the North.



Fig. 7.13 View of the Near North neighborhood before slum clearance.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 3.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Witold Rybczynski, “Bauhaus Blunders: Architecture and Public Housing,” *Public Interest* no.113 (Fall 1993), p. 84.

¹⁵⁵ Whitaker, D., 31.

Extension was built, or what would later be referred to as simply “the reds” by its residents due to the buildings’ red brick finish. (Fig. 7.14) The design included 15 high-rise buildings varying in height from seven to nineteen stories. After its completion the CHA called the project “a symbol of a changing Chicago, because it so sharply contrasts with the blight surrounding it.”¹⁵⁶ As already mentioned, although not the ideal form for families, the high-rise building was marketed for other reasons. The following is an excerpt from a CHA report illustrating how a “new nineteen-story building on the Near North Side is a cross-section of Chicago’s cosmopolitan population”:

A Chinese woman knocks on the door of her German neighbor to ask if she might “get the thread you wanted while I’m at the store.” A little Irish girl waves to her Turkish playmate. Men and women of Armenian, Polish, Swedish, Eskimo, Negro and Italian origin meet with their Indian, Scottish, Puerto Rican, Danish and Mexican neighbors to plan activities for their children. This is the ‘*International Building*,’ part of the Authority’s Frances Cabrini Homes community. The 262 families living here are proving that people of many cultures, many races, many nationalities and religions can live together in harmony, in friendship, and in peace.¹⁵⁷

With the addition of building height came even larger expanses of open space between the buildings. For the first phase of the Cabrini Extension only 16% of the 35-acre site was covered by buildings. Again, streets from the original grid were removed in order to create the large super block in which the high-rise towers would sit. The buildings were set even farther back from the street and located in the center of the block, following the “tower-in-the-park” concept promoted by Le Corbusier. Any relationship



Fig. 7.14 Construction view of the of “the reds”.



Fig. 7.15 Aerial view of “the whites”.

¹⁵⁶ CHA, *Annual Report* (1957).

¹⁵⁷ CHA, *Annual Report* (1956).

that once existed between the individual housing unit and the street was now entirely severed.

Finally, the William Green Homes, the last phase of Cabrini-Green, was completed in 1962 and would eventually be called “the whites” because of the exposed white concrete framing. (Fig. 7.15) The project was named for William Green, a renowned Chicago labor leader. This phase, designed by Pace Associates, consisted of a total of eight high-rise towers of fifteen to sixteen floors each. Some of the cost-cutting measures celebrated in the design included the exclusion of private balconies or terraces. Also, access galleries and elevator lobbies were left open to the elements, an idea that worked better on paper than in the bitter cold months of a Chicago winter. According to the CHA, “The ‘strangeness’ some families feel living in a high building is put to flight by the modern open gallery. Here the valued neighborliness of the small community is transferred to the skyscraper ... (the gallery) provides opportunity to chat with a neighbor while small children play in the open air under close maternal supervision.”¹⁵⁸ The three phases combined were designed to house approximately 10,000 people and extended over roughly 70 acres. (Fig. 7.16) The project was one of the earliest and most extreme examples of single-use zoning in the city with an end net density of about 70 dwelling units per acre of residential land. Seen in aggregate, the three phases of the project come close to

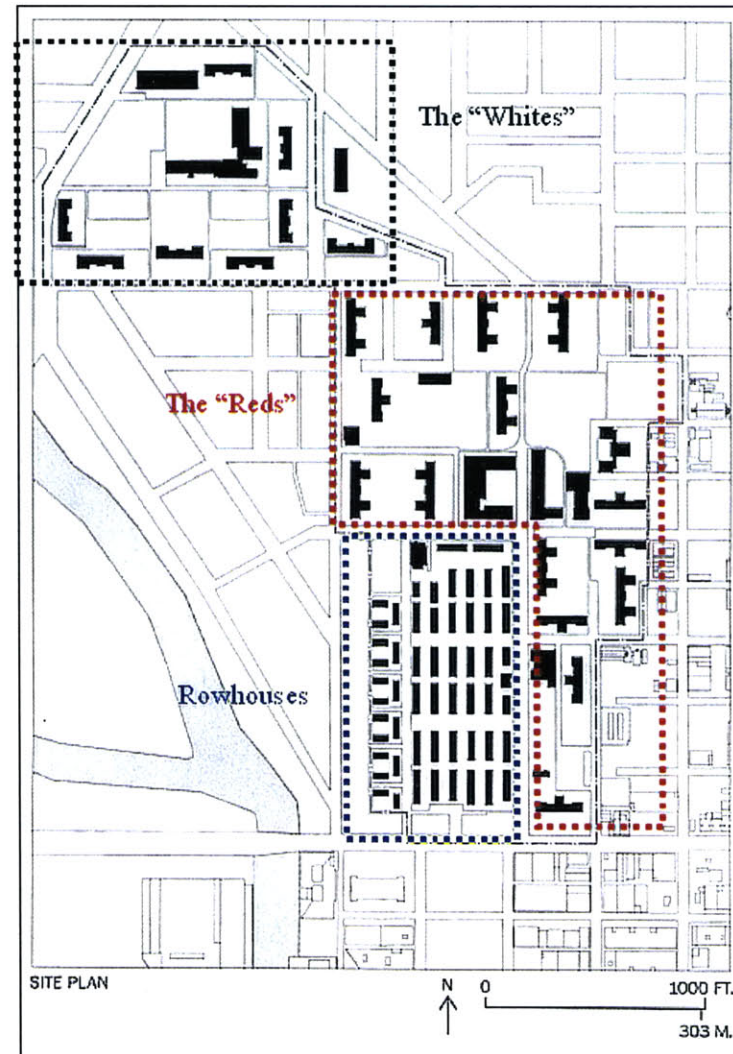


Fig. 7.16 Figure-ground site plan of all three phases. As illustrated by the plan, the amount of open space increases significantly from the rowhouses to the reds and whites.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

realizing the vastness of open space envisioned many years earlier by Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. (Fig. 7.17)

What no one could have predicted – and certainly not the visionaries behind the three phases of Cabrini-Green – was exactly how the image of the project would change over time. Shortly after it was completed, the Cabrini Extension, like the Cabrini Homes before, was viewed by some as a genuine improvement over the conditions existing previously. In a recent collection entitled *Cabrini-Green: in Words and Pictures*, David Whitaker interviewed a number of the residents to give a more accurate portrait of what the community was like from the people who lived there. One resident of “the reds” recalls how she thought she was living in heaven when she first moved in. She says, “It was beautiful. I’m not kidding, it was beautiful.”¹⁵⁹ Another resident, this time of “the whites,” says, “It was a brand new building. It had trees, nice grass and a playground in back, which was something we didn’t see on the West Side. It was beautiful.” But as a third resident recalls, conditions soon began to change: “When the high-rises first went up, people thought it was wonderful. But, they soon found out it was a disaster.”¹⁶⁰

It wasn’t long before Cabrini-Green’s image became more like that of the previous Little Hell: Although dramatically different in form, Cabrini-Green’s reputation would eventually become equally as violent. One resident recalls the first time she heard of somebody being shot was not until the late 60’s: “There was a shooting and that like shocked the whole area over here. The guy got caught, because we felt like he had



Fig. 7.17 Aerial view of Cabrini-Green, 1997.

¹⁵⁹ Whitaker, D., 36.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 79.

messed it up for everybody.”¹⁶¹ Other residents attribute the change in the neighborhood to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. According to one, “I think when it really started turning was after Dr. King got killed in '68...I sure didn't see it comin'. It just happened ... We saw it on TV and we just start runnin' out lookin' for our kids ... They start fightin', the white and the black. I guess they was all mad.”¹⁶²

Violent crimes that were provoked by larger societal problems became commonplace at Cabrini and, as a former resident remembers, were almost an obsession by the local media: “You'd hear in the news, there were three people shot in Cabrini-Green. A liquor store was robbed at Cabrini-Green.” According to him, the names of other communities where crime happened were never given, “...only if it happened in Cabrini-Green.”¹⁶³ Finally, in an attempt to bring some positive press to the project, the city's former Mayor Jane M. Byrne astounded the city and the nation when she decided to take up residence at Cabrini-Green on March 31, 1981. Responding to embarrassing crime statistics – in the first three months of 1981, 11 people were killed and 37 wounded due to gang violence - Mayor Byrne was hoping to turn the situation around and revitalize the development. With her came a number of improved city services such as more police patrols, improved sanitation services, and better lighting. Although the highly political event garnered much media attention, it was not enough to fully transform the neighborhood; after all, the biggest reminder of the project's failure - the buildings – still remained. (Fig. 7.18)



Fig. 7.18 The highly symbolic and visible reminder of public housing failure.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 86.

Re-Imaging Cabrini-Green

In October 1992, Cabrini-Green would once again find itself the subject of negative press when a sniper killed a seven-year-old resident as he walked through the complex on his way to school. Although to some in the media, the event represented just another unfortunate occurrence in the “projects,” the *Chicago Tribune*, rather than just reporting on the event, decided to be more proactive and held an ideas competition to show how Cabrini-Green could, once and for all, be transformed. The importance of the *Chicago Tribune* 1993 competition, and later proposals for Cabrini-Green, is not their innovation in design but rather their insistence on reestablishing the grid and row house typology that existed before. All of the winning entries attempted to thread the existing streets through the superblock and reconnect the project to the neighborhood. New low-rise town houses are interspersed around the base of the existing high-rise towers and are used to redefine the street edge destroyed when the superblocks were originally created. The existing towers remained in order to maintain the same number of affordable housing units, an objective that is not met with later proposals. Each of the schemes treated the project as part of the larger community in an attempt to overcome the project’s isolation from the rest of the city.

Like Weinstein’s project in Washington, the winning schemes looked to other areas in Chicago for inspiration, and attempted to evoke the scale and character of neighborhoods like those Cabrini-Green had originally replaced. The winning scheme went as far as incorporating some of the elements of Burnham’s 1909 Plan, mainly the diagonal street. (Fig. 7.19) Arguably the most innovative contribution of all of the



Fig. 7.19 Don Faulkner and Jim Nelson's award winning scheme for the redesign of Cabrini-Green.



Fig. 7.20 Participants from the U. of Kentucky suggested that there should not be a large-scale planning solution.

proposals had nothing to do with its designs at all, but rather its stance that public housing should be indistinguishable from other neighborhoods and that its form should not stand alone. (Fig. 7.20) Central to the winning scheme was the belief that the neighborhood should comprise a mix of incomes rather than remain an extreme concentration of the poor. Although mixed-income communities are more common today, especially as a result of the HOPE VI program, the concept was still viewed as a very risky and untested proposition at the time of the competition.

In the years after the competition, the city's response to the question of how to transform Cabrini-Green was much more extreme than those proposed thus far. Ultimately, the city maintained that any attempt to transform the project must first include its demolition, an idea that harked back to the days of urban renewal. The city viewed the towers as highly visible reminders of public housing failure, and in 1993, shortly after the competition, it ordered the demolition of three of the towers. In response, the residents of Cabrini-Green filed suit to stop any further demolition, arguing that the city has made no guarantees in finding replacement housing. However, in 1997, yet another violent crime took place, this time involving a nine-year-old girl referred to by the media as "Girl X," lending further impetus to the immediate and all-encompassing transformation proposed by the city.¹⁶⁴

Later that same year, Mayor Daley took the lead in organizing a two-day charrette to kick off a HOPE VI planning process to transform the entire Near North neighborhood.

¹⁶⁴ In fact, as supporting evidence of the need for HOPE VI funding and HUD's support, the CHA provided a full listing of violent crimes that had occurred at Cabrini-Green in the five years prior to the Revitalization Plan, from 1992 to 1997. The list was especially disturbing because of the number of children involved.

Because of the lawsuit filed against the city, the residents of Cabrini-Green were not invited. However, the Mayor did invite the architecture and planning firms of Boston-based Goody Clancy & Associates and Ann Arbor-based JJR/inc. to imagine what the neighborhood would be like once all of the towers are removed. HUD originally wanted the leaders of the New Urbanism to lead the charrette, including one of its founders Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, but Mayor Daley co-opted the process. The plan that resulted from the charrette illustrates not only the persistence of the grid in the proposed transformation of Cabrini-Green, but also the extent to which the city planned to transform the project's overall image. (Fig. 7.21) As Blair Kamin, architectural critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, notes, "while Cabrini-Green is much talked about as a symbol of public housing, it is hardly typical." Few projects are surrounded by such vibrant and fairly well-to-do neighborhoods as Cabrini-Green, which sits just a few blocks from Chicago's Gold Coast. This fact presents both a promise and a problem for future plans, as the residents fight to hold onto their affordable housing and the city fights to dismantle the symbol of failure.

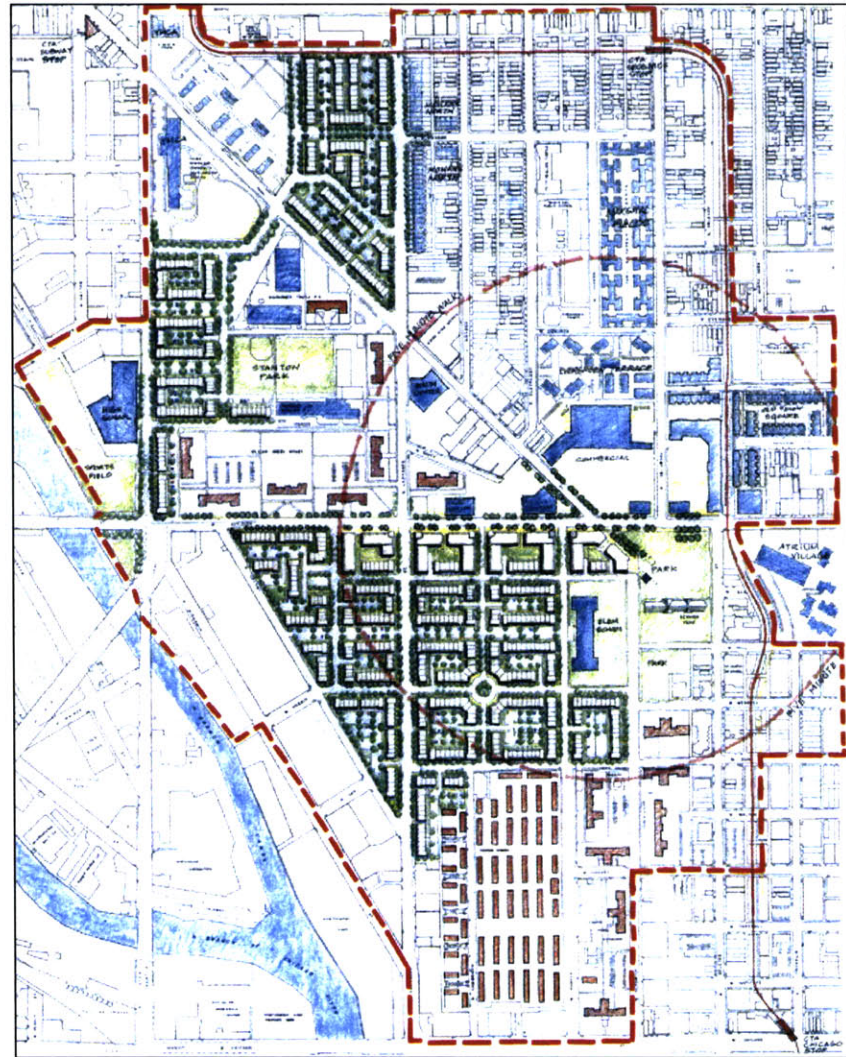


Fig. 7.21 The charrette master plan for the Near North Neighborhood. The new block configuration attempts to break down the existing superblocks. Interesting to note is the amount of green space provided; although less than with the superblock, the amount is likely greater than with the prior slum.

According to John Clancy, one of the participating architects and a figure known for his affordable housing designs in

Boston, including Tent City, the plan attempts to break down the existing superblocks into more conventional city blocks. Recognizing changing lifestyles, the new block dimension is slightly wider than the nineteenth-century version, this in order to accommodate interior parking and individual backyards. (Fig. 7.22) Like the earlier competition schemes, the plan included a combination of different housing types. In this case, a mixture of row houses, duplexes and mid-rises was used for a total of 2,300 units. Unlike earlier schemes, the overall proposed housing needed to accommodate a higher density of people in order to account for the proposed demolition of the existing towers. According to Clancy, although they knew the towers still existed, they were told to design as if they were gone. As a result of the designer's personal insistence on one-for-one replacement of affordable units, the proposed densities were much greater than the city had originally preferred. (Fig. 7.23) New housing would average 40 units per acre, with some blocks as high as 60 units/acre. In order to achieve such densities, the designers proposed using a number of elevator buildings for family housing, a move that would ultimately require a waiver from HUD.

With the slate cleaned by the Mayor, the designers had much more control over the project's overall urban design. Guidelines were established, such as setting the ratio of the distance between the façades of houses to the average height of façades to a maximum of 2.5 to 1. The designers attempted to create sub-neighborhoods, each having a strong sense of identity. Within each sub-neighborhood, a focal public space would be provided. Larger apartment buildings of five to six stories were located along Division Street, emphasizing it as the overall neighborhood's "Main Street." A fairly large public space was created at the heart of the neighborhood to serve as the main

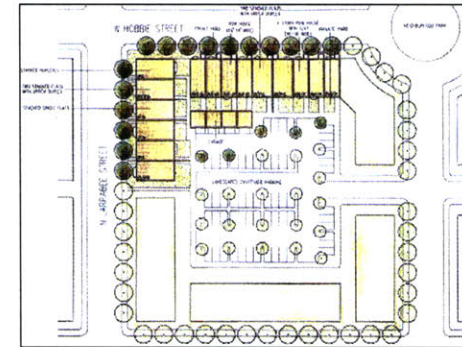


Fig. 7.22 Diagram of proposed block modified from the original block dimensions in order to accommodate interior parking.



Fig. 7.23 Aerial rendering of charrette proposal.

public square. (Fig. 7.24) Interesting to note here is the relatively extensive provision of public space, an amenity that had not existed in this neighborhood before public housing. Therefore, in terms of the amount of open space, the proposed plan falls somewhere between the neighborhood's original plan and those developed using more modernist planning principles.

As already mentioned, the most recent plan provides for a mix of housing, generally consisting of two different types: the lower-density row house and the higher-density elevator building. The mix was selected in order to create a variety of housing sections (Fig. 7.25). The greatest number of housing units was provided using the rowhouse typology, which was modeled after the typical Chicago row house. Each of the new row houses has one to three individual units ranging from small studios to 4-5 bedrooms whereas originally, the row house was intended for just one family. The units range from 600 s.f. for a studio to 2500 s.f. for a five-bedroom unit. The heights range from three to four stories. The higher-density elevator buildings were located along primary streets including Division or "Main Street." (Fig. 7.26) The apartment buildings proposed in this latest plan included units ranging from studios at 500 s.f. to 3-bedroom units at 1400 s.f. Typically, there would be 100 to 150 units per building. The depth of the buildings was 55-65' and the height ranged from five to six stories. In order to ensure a diverse mix of residents and minimize the concentration of poverty, the following income mix was proposed: 30% public housing, 20% affordable and 50% market-rate.

After the charrette, the CHA submitted the Revitalization Plan to HUD with exuberant optimism: "The CHA's HOPE VI Plan promises to transform Cabrini-Green, an infamous



Fig. 7.24 Street rendering of charrette proposal.

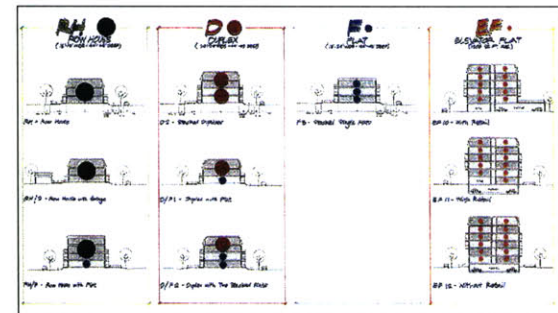


Fig. 7.25 A variety of sections were proposed to create a diverse neighborhood.



Fig. 7.26 A street view of proposed higher-density housing along Division Street.

public housing development, and integrate public housing in a vibrant revitalized Near North Side neighborhood.”¹⁶⁵ By partnering with the City and the Mayor’s Near North Redevelopment Initiative (NNRI), the CHA has made it clear that a transformation of the entire neighborhood, and not just Cabrini-Green, is critical in order for it to be successful. Reflecting the general trend of the HOPE VI program, the Plan stipulates that HOPE VI funds will be “expended solely for the purchase and/or lease of newly constructed units.” Although the CHA understands the critical need for modernization of existing projects, the Authority will not fund it through HOPE VI, but will instead “work with the Cabrini Resident Management Corporations to establish modernization priorities and identify appropriate resources.” An example of the change in the CHA’s attitude is illustrated through plans for one of the Cabrini high-rise buildings – 1158 N Cleveland. According to their original HOPE VI plan, the building was going to be rehabilitated. In the 1997 Revitalization Plan, their objectives reflected the new preference for demolition: “The site planning and marketability of the first phase of onsite development depends on being able to develop a cleared site” and that “demolition of 1158 N. Cleveland will actually facilitate the provision of mixed-income housing on-site at Cabrini-Green.”¹⁶⁶

According to the Revitalization Plan, the CHA recommends unusually high densities for the replacement housing of between 50 and 60 units per acre (as compared to the 70 units per acre of the existing project). These densities are a direct result of the suggestions made by the planners and architects during the Mayor’s charrette. Understanding that such high densities are not in keeping with the typical HUD-

¹⁶⁵ CHA, Near North Side HOPE VI Plan, 1998 (insert letter).

approved HOPE VI project and its objective of deconcentrating poverty, the Plan offers the following justification:

An important concern related to density is the 50-60 units per acre recommended for the CHA-owned land. While there is not an appreciable reduction in density (from what was there before), it should be clear that by referring to dedensification the CHA is explicitly referring to a reduction of units for very low-income households. Creating a mixed-income development on-site will reverse the traditional isolation of the development from the surrounding community.¹⁶⁷

A cursory scan of the proposed (and some now completed) projects under Phase 1 reveals how the densities promoted by the Plan are not actually being met: Orchard Park is 18 du/acre, Mohawk North is 28.2 du/acre and Old Town Square is 17.9 du/acre.¹⁶⁸

Cabrini-Green to the Old Town Village

Many people, including the current Cabrini-Green residents, feel that creating the kind of place envisioned by the Mayor while maintaining its affordability is not feasible. According to Clancy, one resident's comment after seeing the renderings of the proposed neighborhood was, "It looks beautiful. But there's no way that public housing can look that good." For the most part, what the neighborhood will look like remains to be seen. Only a few of the 2400 units proposed, as well as some of the more "public"

¹⁶⁶ CHA, Cabrini Revitalization Plan, 4-3.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 4-12.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3-1.

amenities, have been built. So far, what has been built bears little, if any, resemblance to the kind of neighborhood suggested by the architect's renderings.

Orchard Park, a mixed-income community at the northern edge of the Revitalization Plan, consists of 54 townhouses, of which 13 are reserved for public housing residents. (Fig. 7.27) Started before the Mayor's plan took effect and completed by 1999, the project does not meet the plan's requirement that 30% of the units go to public housing residents. The three-acre site is owned by the CHA. The project was started under the former CHA leadership, and soon after went into receivership, to demonstrate the viability of mixed-income developments. Evidenced by the fact that the community is completely enclosed by a six-foot wrought-iron fence with keycard access required for both vehicles and pedestrians, security was a primary concern. The project is representative of earlier CHA proposals, whereas the existing mid-rise buildings were rehabilitated rather than demolished. The low-rise townhouses wrap the perimeter of the block, creating an edge to the street.

Directly to the east of Orchard Park is another one of the CHA's Phase 1 mixed-income communities: Mohawk North. (Fig. 7.28) The mixed-income community consists of 92 units with only 16 reserved for public housing – because again, the project was started before the 30% requirement. Even still, this project is promoted both by the CHA and HUD as representative of HOPE VI development. The project was featured as an “after” in the HUD report *A Promise Being Fulfilled: The Transformation of America's Public Housing*, although mislabeled as Henry Horner Homes. (Fig. 7.29) The project was also highlighted on the report's cover. According to Francisco Arcaute, the CHA's



Fig. 7.27 View of Orchard Park.



Fig. 7.28 Street view of Mohawk North.



Fig. 7.29 HUD's marketing of the Cabrini-Green transformation.

Deputy Director of Communications, Mohawk North is exactly the kind of housing the CHA would like to see replacing all of its mid- to high-rise buildings. According to Arcaute, there are two main objectives of the CHA. The first one is to demolish anything over fourteen stories and build low-rise townhouses in their place. Holding up a photo of Mohawk North, he gives the second objective, "You will not tell the difference between affordable and not (affordable) as you drive by them." (Fig. 7.30)

Walking by the project into some of the neighboring blocks reveals that, although within the project itself one might not be able to identify the affordable units, the project as a whole stands out from the neighborhood as something conspicuously different from the rest. Going one block to the east, one finds a street made up of housing varied in both architectural style and scale. (Fig. 7.31) The buildings range in height from two to five stories, some with balconies, others with porches, and yet others with neither. On the same street one also finds more of the Mohawk North project, this time serving as infill housing. Although intended to blend into the surrounding urban fabric, the units stand out - or rather stand back - since they are set back a few feet from the build-to line of the rest of the street. Also, the kind of variety of building height and scale stops once one reaches the infill housing, as all of the units are exactly the same size and height, except for the pitched versus flat roof. The repetitiveness of the buildings is indicative of the kind of economies of scale often found in more affordable housing. However, unique to many HOPE VI projects, and also true of public housing before, is the sheer scale of the overall development and the ability of one project to completely overwhelm an entire neighborhood.



Fig. 7.30 The affordable units at Mohawk North are indistinguishable from the market-rate units.



Fig. 7.31 Mohawk North is distinguishable from other housing in the neighborhood.

Finally, heading south on North Larrabee toward Division Street, one arrives at the Old Town Square development. Although no housing is yet built, a stop at the development's sales office reveals that the housing will not look much different from that built at Mohawk North – which is less than surprising, given that its the same developer is one and the same. An architect's rendering illustrates almost the identical unit as before, clad in brick with small front porches and a variety of bays and rooflines. (Fig. 7.32) The sales agent informs the potential buyer that there are two developments that make up the Old Town Village: the East Village and the West Village. According to the sales brochure with the heading "I live in the village":

MCL welcomes you to one of the most exciting new communities on Chicago's near north side. No, it's not one of the most exciting new communities. It's two. Old Town Village has a distinctive East section and an equally distinctive West section...East or West, you'll enjoy the pleasures you'd expect from a village.

Although there is no difference in the design of the units in each – again, this is less than surprising, given the uniformity of the design found in the developer's other projects – there is an enormous difference in the price. For example, a 2,834 sf., three-bedroom single-family home with two-car garage in the West Village sells for \$715,900, whereas the identical unit sells for only \$485,900 in the East Village. The sales clerk clarifies the difference by explaining that since this is a "transitional" neighborhood, the farther west one goes, the more affordable the houses become. What the clerk and the sales literature fail to mention, however is that just one block "farther west" brings one precisely into the middle of Cabrini-Green.

Although not as explicit in the sales office, the presence of Cabrini-Green becomes vividly explicit the minute one steps outside. This is so because many of the buildings



Fig. 7.32 Rendering of planned Old Town Village units.

are still standing except for the ones being gradually dismantled. The contrast of imagery in this one location could not be greater, illustrating exactly how truly dramatic the shift taking place is. As one of the Cabrini “reds” is being torn down, a new clock tower for Seward Park rises up just a few feet away. (Fig. 7.33) Just across Division Street, another “sign” of the changing times – and of a changing neighborhood – is that of a Starbucks café. (Fig. 7.34) As the Old Town Village brochure boasts: “...conveniently located between our East and West communities, is MCL’s Old Town Square Shopping Center – your own Dominick’s [a gourmet grocery store], Blockbuster, Starbucks and more, just steps away...We invite you to become a part of it. To make the village...yours.” According to the Revitalization Plan, “For too long residents of Cabrini have lacked nearby commercial and retail facilities...This plan will address these critical needs.”¹⁶⁹ One wonders if the types of commercial and retail being provided are truly meant to serve the residents of Cabrini or rather those seeking to make the “village” theirs.

Any doubts that the neighborhood will attract market-rate tenants have been effectively quashed by recent housing sales. Almost all of the Old Town Village homes have been sold long before the ground is even broken. If anything, some people – including many of the residents – doubt that the site will remain affordable in the long run and that current residents will just get pushed farther out. Echoing this belief, one resident believes that creating a negative image of the site was part of the city’s long-term plan to eventually take back the prime piece of real estate. She says, “There was violence going on all around, but it was highlighted in our community. It was basically because the community sits on the richest property in the city of Chicago, so why would you ever



Fig. 7.33 As Cabrini comes down, the new Seward Park clock tower goes up.



Fig. 7.34 The concurrent demolition of Cabrini and the addition of Starbucks contribute to the overall transformation of the neighborhood.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 4-14.

want to make it seem like anything good is happening there if you got a plan, which has been in place for years, that was called gentrification?"¹⁷⁰ Others feel that attracting market-rate tenants to a project that has had such a bad image will prove more difficult as the plan proceeds. While the skeptics remain in disbelief, a transformation is in fact moving ahead, and it is being fueled by more than a billion dollars from HUD. Whether or not the transformation is only possible because Chicago is experiencing the kind of economic boom that has made the city famous, or whether this most recent chapter in the Cabrini-Green story will end up yet another bust, remains to be seen.

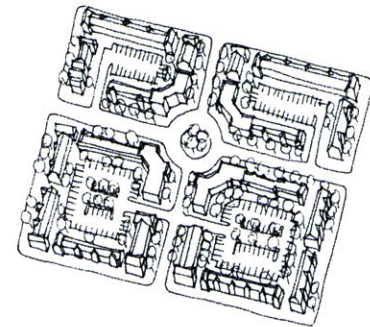
¹⁷⁰ Whitaker, D., 207.

8

HOPE VI: The Image of the Village Meets the Modern Project

In Old Town Village West, select a single-family home, or a residence within a building that offers a new architectural spin on the traditional Chicago-style 3-flat. East or West, you'll enjoy all the pleasures you'd expect from a village. A variety of housing styles. Nearby recreation. There is private parking. And, conveniently located between our East and West communities, is MCL's Old Town Square Shopping Center – your own Dominick's, Blockbuster, Starbucks and more, just steps away. This is a neighborhood with excitement in the air, a place of new possibilities. We invite you to become a part of it. To make the Village...yours.

"I Live in the Village"
MCL Companies



From Slum to Project to Village

As illustrated in the previous chapters, public housing has gone through two main stages of image transformation: first the initial imaging of the “slums” in order to make way for the grandiose projects of the 1940’s and 1950’s, and then the re-imaging of “the” projects as mixed-income communities from the 1990’s onward. Originally, public housing was presented as the modern utopian solution to the overcrowded “indecent and unsanitary” neighborhoods of the past. Today, public housing is hidden within the mixed-income community, and is presented as the retrograde solution to projects that some believed looked too much to the future for their design. With each transformation, housing promoters presented their preferred image and the housing was designed according to that image. Not only was there a significant typological shift in housing form at each stage, but also a significant shift in housing’s symbolic or metaphorical associations.

As Vale and Warner have argued, “City design ... is a process of brokering the best metaphor, in ways that will shift or consolidate public sensibilities and invent the possibility for new kinds of place attachments.”¹⁷¹ Seen in this way, the imaging (and re-imaging) of public housing has attempted to achieve the same kind of metaphorical shift. This phenomenon is perhaps most overtly expressed in the last case study of this thesis, in which a neighborhood formerly known as a “slum” is recast as a “project,” then remade once again as a “village.” However, rather than simply coming full circle, aspects of both the slum and the modern project come together in the village, as the image of the old neighborhood gets updated to meet the market demands of the twenty-

¹⁷¹ Vale and Warner, 3.

first century. In concluding the thesis, this phenomenon will be explored in more detail through a closer look at the three case neighborhoods. Ultimately, as the case studies illustrate, the imaging and re-imaging resulted in a significant physical transformation from one phase to the next.

In an attempt to better understand both transformations, the following pages will reassess the three types of housing and the resulting urbanism created at each phase. For greater ease of identification, the three phases will henceforth be known as the “slum,” the “project” and the “village.” The focus of the analysis will be on the most recent transformation, because it will shed greater light on current attitudes about the appropriate form of a mixed-income community (i.e., the “village”). In contrast to public housing and the previous slum neighborhood, however: There are now greater neighborhood expectations among the newly added market-rate residents. For example, market-driven standards for preferred housing form, parking and automobile accessibility, parks and open space, and adjacent shopping are adding significantly to the overall transformation of sites formerly occupied exclusively by people with little or no choice. Moreover, as cities such as Chicago plan to replace most, if not all, of their public housing with mixed-income communities, it behooves those concerned with the design of cities to better understand the impact these new communities will have.

To begin, the plans for the three phases of each neighborhood are illustrated side by side in Figure 8.1. Presenting all nine plans together reveals some important similarities between the three different neighborhoods at each phase of development. Looking first at the slum category for each neighborhood, the finely grained texture of

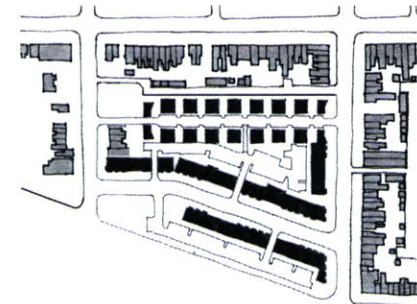
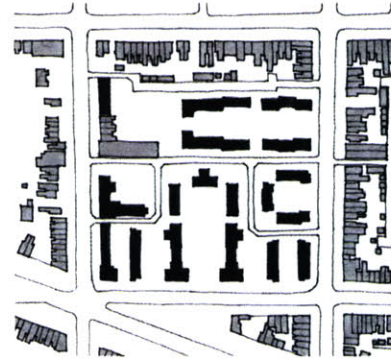
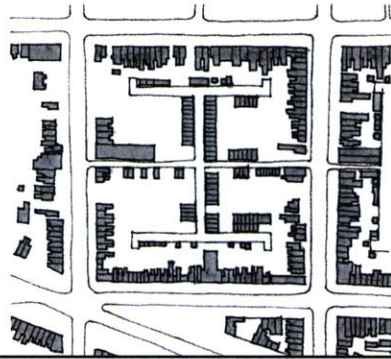
Slum

Project

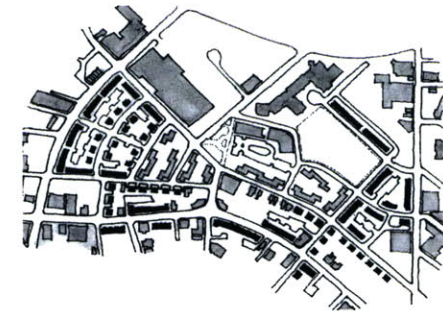
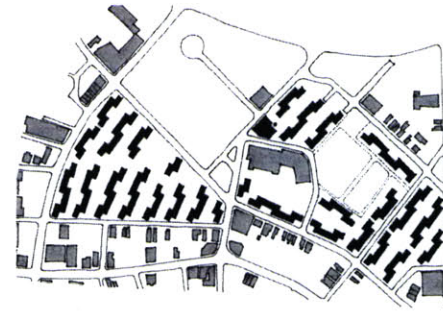
Village

Fig. 8.1

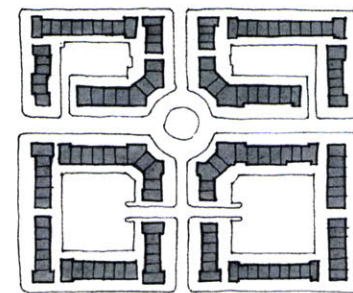
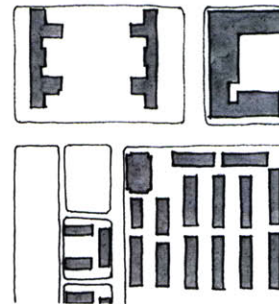
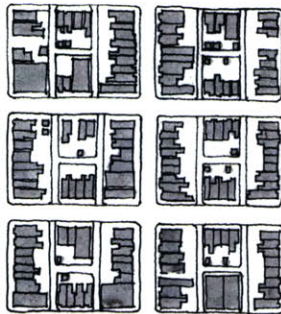
**Ellen
Wilson**



**Orchard
Park**



**Cabrini
Green**
(Representative
Blocks)



the urban fabric is immediately apparent. A mix of residential, commercial and industrial uses is interwoven throughout the site and generally follows the pattern of streets. In Washington and Chicago, the streets tend to be orthogonal to one another, whereas the street pattern in Boston is more irregular. In all three neighborhoods, it is common to find small alleyways penetrating the interior of the block. Also apparent at this phase, and not so with later phases, is the asymmetrical and random location of buildings – in other words, there is no evidence of an overarching plan. Finally, this phase has the least amount of open space for each of the neighborhoods.

Moving on to the project phase, very little remains from the previous phase, save a few churches, schools and parks. The housing, however, has been completely reconfigured. The finely grained texture of the previous neighborhood has given way to a completely ordered and highly planned configuration. In Washington's Ellen Wilson Homes, housing units are arranged symmetrically around newly created open courtyards, which are arranged to extend deep into the block. The previous distinction between the perimeter and the interior of the block no longer exists. In Boston's Orchard Gardens and Chicago's Cabrini Homes, new housing units are arranged primarily parallel to one another, creating relatively long paths of open space between the buildings. In all three neighborhoods, streets have been removed to create superblocks and the open space is significantly greater than before. In this phase, the distinction between the project and the surrounding neighborhood is most apparent.

Finally, the plans for the village phase reveal a kind of hybrid condition between the architecture and urban design of the slum and the project. Even though the plans for

this phase reveal more housing variety than the project phase, they do not achieve the level of variation that existed in the slum. In fact, the housing remains highly standardized and regularized, in order to meet the necessary economies of scale, but at the same time tries to recreate the variety and diversity of the prior condition. This is an attempt to make the village “indistinguishable” from the surrounding context. The belief that a community can be built all at once is the same for both the project and the village. However, with the village the community is designed to look organic like the surrounding context where as the modernist project was designed as a complete, self-referential and an internally focused community different from its context. As in the previous phase, the arrangement of housing on the site is highly ordered and often symmetrical. For example, the western portion of the Boston neighborhood is symmetrical about the new street, and in Washington the housing is symmetrical on either side of Ellen Wilson Place. As for open space, the village has less than the project but more than the slum. For example, in Boston, the new Orchard Park open space is larger than the original park, and spaces internal to the new blocks are left open. Contributing to the increase in open space from the prior slum is the village’s need for parking. Much of the block’s internal open space is devoted to surface parking in order to accommodate increased parking demands from the site’s new higher-income residents. As the Cabrini-Green case study illustrates, the new wider block configuration was due in part to the need to accommodate internal parking, a concern that was obviously not present when the city was originally platted.

Although the focus of this study has been primarily on the changing form of housing from one phase to the next, a quick look at how the form of other neighborhood uses

has changed is also informative, and arguably indicative of the hybrid condition of the village. One use in particular that was formerly found in the slum and that reappears in the Old Town Village of Chicago is retail; however, the Old Town Village Shopping Center is hardly the neighborhood corner store. For one, the type of stores offered – i.e. Starbucks, Dominicks – do not support the market of the current neighborhood, but rather the presumed higher-income market of the future village and the already existing abutting neighborhoods. In addition, the site design indicates a different notion of accessibility. Formerly, smaller shops were embedded in the fabric of the slum neighborhood and were easily accessible for pedestrians, whereas in the village the big-box retail is designed to be easily accessible by car. Interestingly, the push for more traditional forms of retail has not yet occurred as it has for the housing. This is partly explained by the highly symbolic nature of certain housing types - and the persistent preference for the single-family home over multi-family housing - whereas one can argue the same is not true for retail. Despite the occasional article lamenting the loss of small “mom-and-pop” stores, the market still demands big-box retail.

Another use that was once an integral part of the slum is industrial and manufacturing, which often provided jobs for those living there. Today, the village is lacking any such use, and is more reflective of the Euclidian zoning of the project, which is based on the belief that residential uses should be separate from other uses. This is one of the reasons why Michael Pyatok, a known architect of affordable housing, accuses the HOPE VI program of attempting to “package people in cute bungalows.” According to Pyatok, live-work opportunities are crucial for improving residents’ lives, more so than the design of their homes. He believes that HOPE VI is “just another case of us

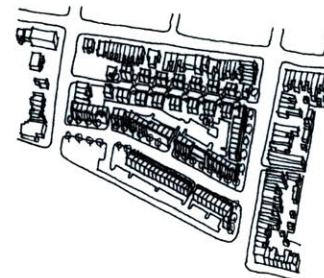
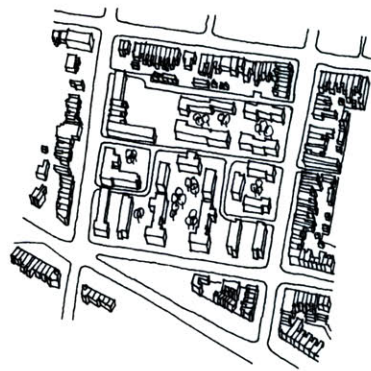
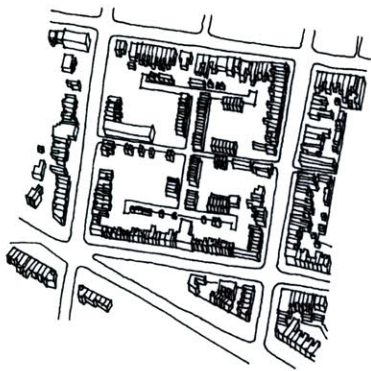
Slum

Project

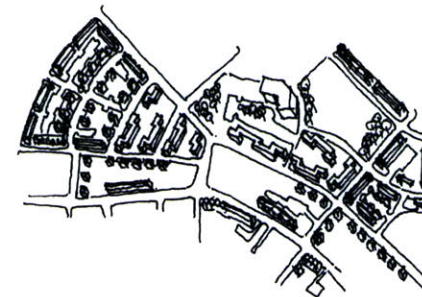
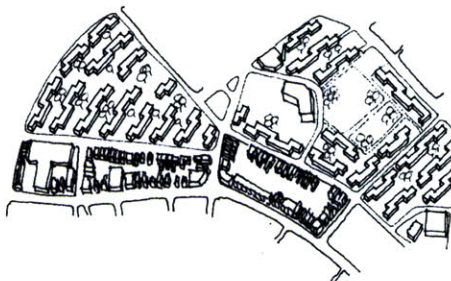
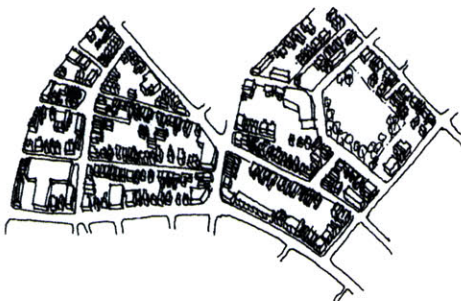
Village

Fig. 8.2

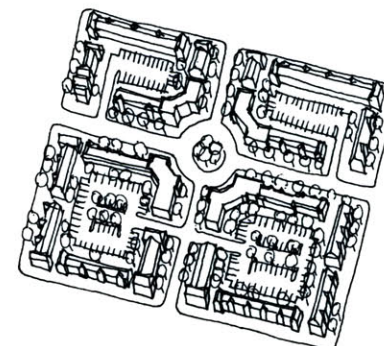
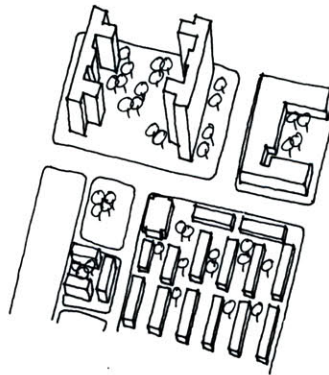
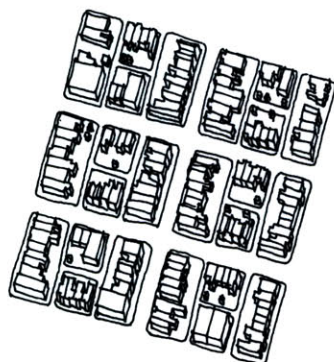
**Ellen
Wilson**



**Orchard
Park**



**Cabrini
Green
(Representative
Blocks)**



imposing our ideals onto real communities and not attempting to understand who the people really are.”¹⁷²

In addition to the plan comparison between the three phases of neighborhood development, a three-dimensional comparison is also revealing. Aerial sketches of each of the neighborhoods are presented in Figure 8.3. As illustrated in the earlier USHA reports and later HUD HOPE VI reports, the transformation of public housing involved significant formal and typological changes in the architecture, which is best expressed in three dimensions. Again, in all three neighborhoods, the slum had the greatest variety of housing form in massing. In Washington, smaller alley dwellings were surrounded by larger Victorian homes along the block's perimeter, whereas in Boston, a variety of single-family homes, triple-deckers and larger multi-unit residential buildings were mixed throughout the site. Not surprisingly, the least variety of housing forms existed during the project phase. For all three neighborhoods, the low-rise barracks-style typology was used. However, in Chicago, the mid- and high-rise typology was also used following the 1949 Housing Act. Finally, the massing of housing in the village phase tends to be more uniform than the slum but less uniform than the project. In Boston and Washington, the building heights varied between two and four stories, whereas in Chicago the units that have been built are so far uniformly two to three stories. In Washington, only five building types were used and in Boston there were essentially only two: the row house and the duplex.

¹⁷² Pyatok, Michael. GSD Lecture.

Slum

Project

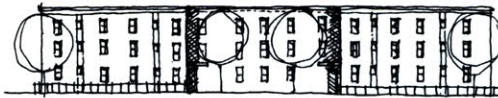
Village

Fig. 8.3

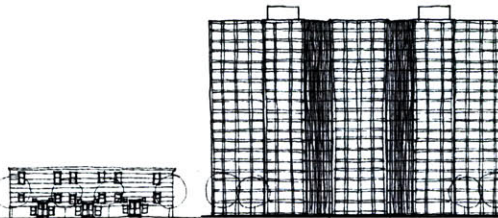
**Ellen
Wilson**



**Orchard
Park**



**Cabrini
Green**
(Representative
Block)



Finally, a comparison of unit façades and their composite streetscapes presents noticeable differences between the three phases, especially in the way the preferred image becomes embedded in both the project and village streetscape. As with the plan and massing comparisons, the streetscape of the slum represents the greatest variety in the architecture and that of the project represents the least. For the village, the Washington example attempts to replicate the varied streetscape that exists throughout Capitol Hill, while the Chicago example streetscape is much more repetitive and uniform than before. In the Boston case, at its most extreme, the streetscape between the slum and the village is considerably different. Illustrated is a sketch of the duplex streetscape with its wide-open spaces between units and perimeter picket fencing; this view is a remarkable change from the representative slum condition. The resulting image is clearly neither the project nor the slum, but rather an image of the idealized past modified to meet the present and presumed future market. It is an image of something between suburbia and the city – more urban than the suburbs but having many suburban conveniences such as private yards, multiple porches and ample parking.

Envisioning the Village

Imaging the mixed-income community from the former low-income project proves to be the most difficult task currently facing HUD and its housing authorities. The former imaging of public housing from the slum was also complex, but by no means did it seek to create the level of income-mixing that is currently afoot in some of HUD's most promising properties. Furthermore, the initial imaging of the project did not have to overcome years of negative imaging by the media and other sources discussed in Chapter One. The case that best illustrates the kind of extreme re-imaging currently happening with the change from project to village is Cabrini-Green. Although one of the most notorious projects in the country, the site also includes some of Chicago's most attractive and sought-after real estate, just minutes from the Gold Coast. Nowhere has a former public housing site been able to capture retail tenants the likes of Starbucks and Blockbuster Video, which is why the current Cabrini tenants are so concerned about being forced from the site altogether. Adding to their concern is the type and form of the development already completed, which is geared more toward wealthier non-residents. The Old Town Square Shopping Center, rather than being the village square implied by its name or originally envisioned by the CHA, instead more closely resembles a high-end shopping plaza found in the suburbs. In a city famous for speculation, Chicago's Cabrini-Green best illustrates the kind of speculation that is occurring in all of HUD's mixed-income communities – this time, of future market demands. In the case of Cabrini-Green, speculating the future market has superseded meeting the needs of the most immediate market and in so doing has already altered the urban landscape accordingly.

Fueling much of the transformation from project to village is the continued belief that mid- to high-rise forms of housing are inappropriate for families with children. In general, the desire to create low-rise forms of housing deemed better for children have resulted in much lower densities for the village schemes in relation to their context. However, if one actually looks at the market moving into the city the argument is not entirely relevant. In a recent study of Philadelphia completed in 1999, Eugenie Birch concluded that the majority of people moving back into that city were either “empty nesters” or young couples with no children. She also discovered that the primary reason why many families with children are not moving into the city is the absence of good schools. So unless more HOPE VI projects are linked to better amenities for families – and indeed, better social infrastructure in the way of schools, for example – the desire of attracting market-rate families with children will ultimately not be met.¹⁷³

As housing authorities and their architects seek to re-image the projects to be more palatable to a marketable public, they would do well to proceed carefully. Once the needs of the presumed market replace those most in need, the objectives of the HOPE VI program become diluted and misdirected. Few would question the mistakes made when many public housing projects were initially built and how they developed over time, as they became the housing of last resort. Concentrating poverty in isolated projects was a mistake and no doubt should be corrected. However, what should be questioned is the driving force behind the most recent transformation. Is it the desire to create more diverse communities or a plan to remove the least desired? Is it the desire

¹⁷³ Some PHAs now understand the need for better schools to attract the market. For example, Centennial Place in Atlanta and Holly Park in Seattle both have new schools as part of their HOPE VI plans.

to correct design deficiencies of earlier projects or a plan to replace the “good design” of the CIAM with that of the CNU? Is it the desire to improve the lives of current residents or a plan to improve the image of HUD?

As past errors have shown, good intentions do not necessarily result in good communities. In fact, attempts to create community have often achieved nothing more than displacing the real community that existed there before. What is created instead is often the sterilized and falsified versions of community as defined those who wield the political power to realize their vision, however whimsical. One of the great innovations of HOPE VI is the flexibility it provides cities and their housing authorities to tailor public housing according to their unique situation and to the specific needs of their residents. It is the flexibility allowed by the program that provides the potential for overcoming the rigidity of previous modern housing strategies. The challenge of HOPE VI is not only to look to the past, but also to the future, in seeking ways to be innovative and more inclusive. As one author writes, “The more perfect the recreation of the past, the more inflexible it becomes for dealing with the future, with diversity, and with less perfect neighboring conditions.”¹⁷⁴ As it currently stands, the HOPE VI program is shaping up to repeat the same modernist mistakes it seeks to correct. The resulting images may be different but the approach is disturbingly similar. So, rather than dying with Pruitt-Igoe, modernism actually lives on in the more traditional skin of the village.

¹⁷⁴ Dunham-Jones, 26.

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Fig. 6.8, 6.10 The Bostonian Society.

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Fig. 6.15 Rotch Visual Collections

Fig. 6.16, 6.18, 6.20, 6.21 Photo taken by author

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